



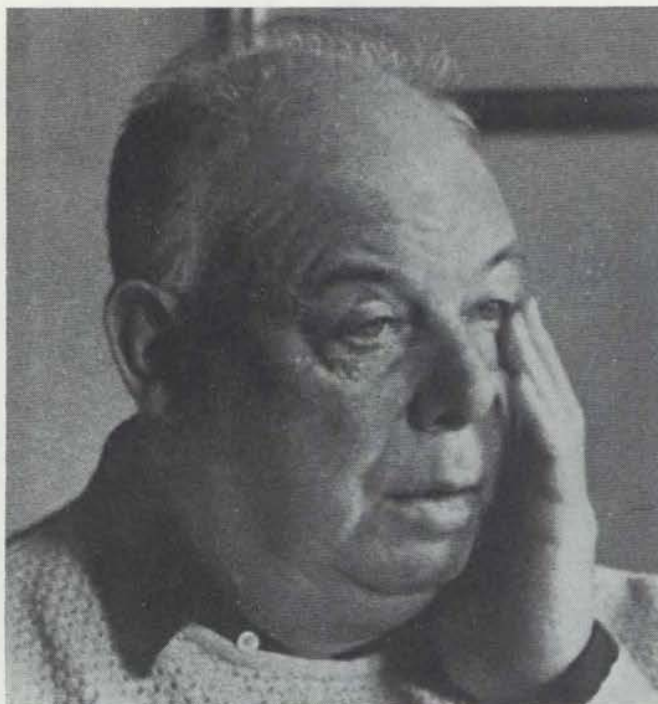
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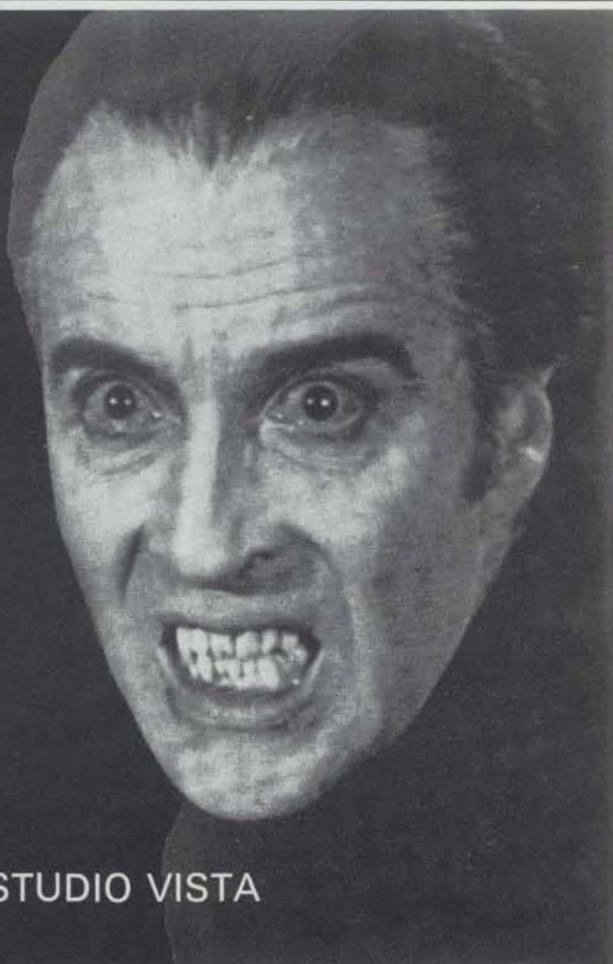
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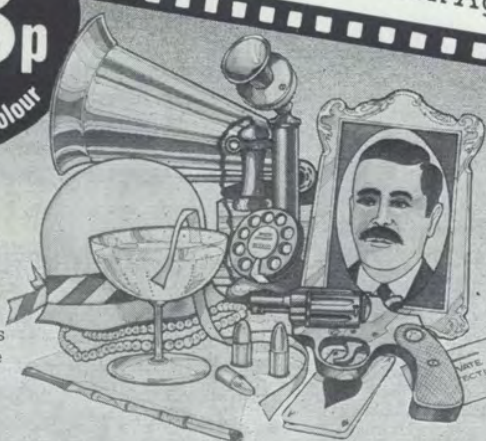
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The London Film Festival is open to the general public and tickets are available at the National Film Theatre from 9th November. Members of the British Film Institute receive advance notification of the Festival programme and can send in their postal bookings at the beginning of November. Full details about both membership and the Festival are available from the Box Office, National Film Theatre, South Bank, Waterloo, London SE1 (Tel 01-928 3232/3) or from the Membership Department, British Film Institute, 81 Dean Street, London, W1 (Tel 01-437 4355).

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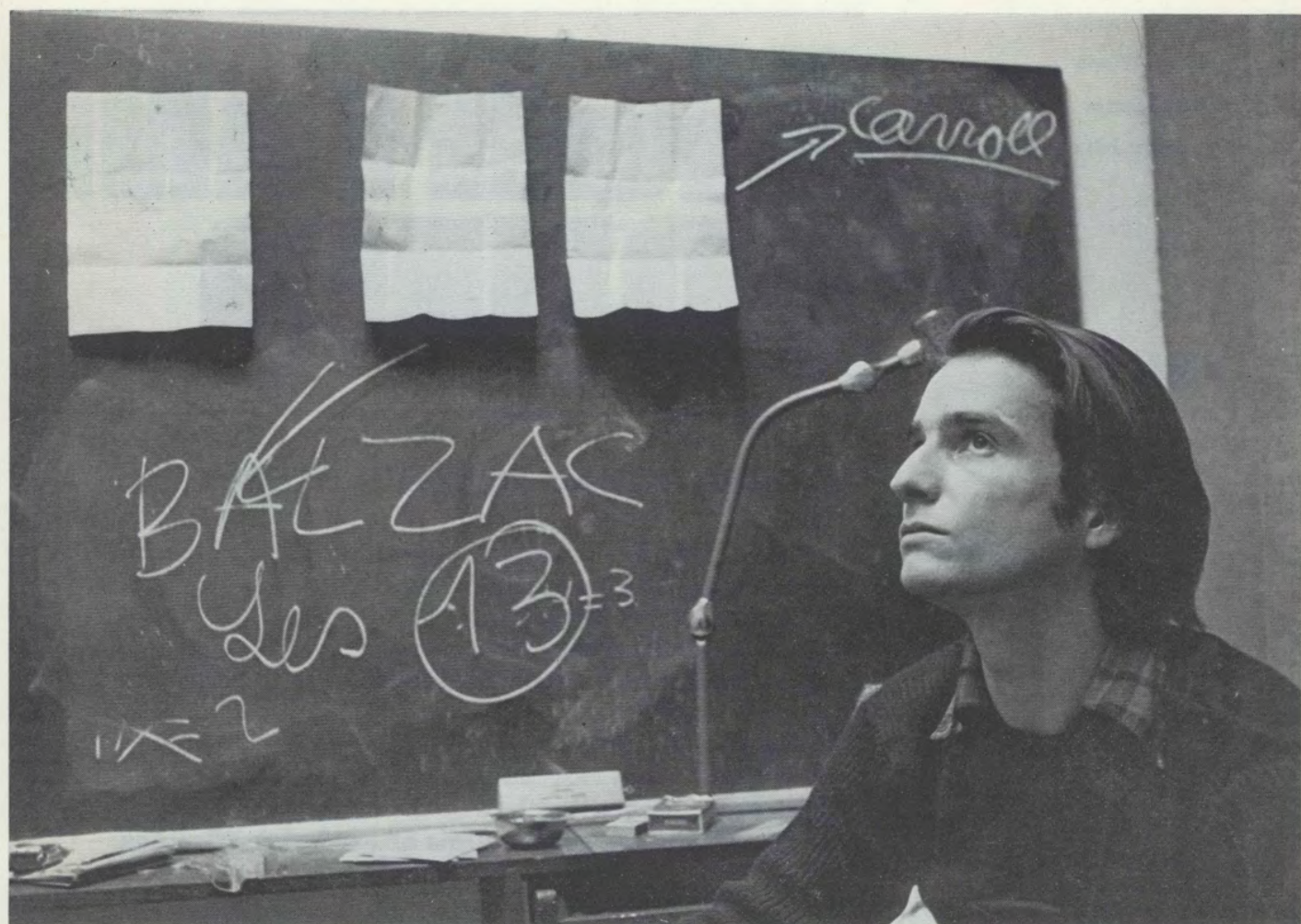
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*On the cover: Tony Scott's
'The Author of Beltraffio'*

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WORK AND PLAY IN THE HOUSE OF FICTION



In the spring of 1970, Jacques Rivette shot about thirty hours of improvisation with over three dozen actors. Out of this massive and extremely open-ended material have emerged two films, both of which contrive to subvert the traditional moviegoing experience at its roots. *Out 1*, lasting twelve hours and forty minutes, has been screened publicly only once (at Le Havre, 9–10 September 1971) and remains for all practical purposes an invisible, legendary work. (Its subtitle, significantly, is *Noli me tangere*.) *Spectre*, which Rivette spent the better part of a year editing out of the first film—running 255 minutes, or roughly a third as long—was released in Paris earlier this year. And during the interval between the editing of *Spectre* and its release, Rivette shot and edited a third film, *Céline et Julie vont en bateau*, 195 minutes in length, which surfaced in Cannes last May.

The differences between *Spectre* and *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* are considerable: they are respectively the director's 'heaviest' film and his 'lightest', probably the least and most accessible of his six features to date. Both of them clearly situate Rivette in the forefront of narrative innovation in contemporary French cinema, exhibiting a sophistication about the entire fiction-making process that seems to go well beyond the recent efforts of his peers. On a narrative level, one might say that they resume a line of development abandoned by Resnais after *Last Year at Marienbad* and *Muriel*, and by Godard after *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her* and *Made in U.S.A.*

To have fused many of the concerns of these separate lines of inquiry is remarkable enough. What is more remarkable still is that Rivette has extended them, into the outer reaches of a terrain that the following notes can only attempt to sketch.

1

[Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz*] causes earache the first time through, especially for those new to Coleman's music. The second time, its cacophony lessens and its complex balances and counter-balances begin to take effect. The third time, layer upon layer of pleasing configurations—rhythmic, melodic, contrapuntal, tonal—becomes visible. The fourth or fifth listening, one swims readily along, about ten feet down, breathing the music like air.

Whitney Balliett, 'Abstract'
(in *Dinosaurs in the Morning*)

If there is something comforting—religious, if you want—about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long.

Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

The organising principle adopted by Rivette in shooting the raw material of *Out 1* and *Spectre* was the notion of a *complot* (plot, conspiracy) derived from Balzac's *Histoire des treize*, where thirteen individuals occupying different sectors of French society form a secret alliance to consolidate their power. Consciously setting out to make a critique of the conspiratorial *zeitgeist* of his first feature, *Paris Nous Appartient*, Rivette also used this principle to arrange meetings and confrontations between his actors, each of whom was invited to invent and improvise his own character in relation to the overall intrigue.

It should be noted that repeated viewings of *Spectre* help to clarify not its 'plot' but its formal organisation. The analogy suggested above between Rivette and Coleman is far more relevant, however, to the notion of *performance*. Much like Coleman's 38-minute venture into group improvisation

with seven other musicians, *Spectre*'s surface is dictated by accommodations, combinations and clashes brought about by contrasting styles of 'playing'. The textures run the gamut from the purely cinematic skills of Jean-Pierre Léaud and Juliet Berto to the stage-bound techniques of Françoise Fabian; from the nervousness of Michel Lonsdale to the placidity of Jacques Doniol-Valcroze; from the reticence of Bulle Ogier to the garrulity of Bernadette Lafont.

For Coleman as for Rivette, the thematic material is kept to a minimum and mainly used as an expedient—a launching pad to propel each solo player into a 'statement' of his own that elicits responses from the others. Apart from the brief ensemble passages written by Coleman, there is no composer behind *Free Jazz*, hence no composition; the primary role of Coleman as leader is to assemble players and establish a point of departure for their improvising.

Rivette's role in *Spectre* is similar, with the crucial difference that he edits and rearranges the material afterwards, assembling shots as well as players. And the assembly is one that works *against* the notion of continuity: sustained meaning, the province of an *auteur*, is deliberately withheld—from the audience as well as the actors. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that the '13' in *Spectre* never reveals itself as anything more than a chimera. By the time the film is two-thirds over, it is evident that the *complot* is a pipe-dream that never got off the ground, an idea once discussed among thirteen individuals that apparently went no further. Aside from the efforts of certain characters (mainly Lonsdale and Fabian) to keep its real or hypothetical existence hidden, and the attempts or threats of others (Léaud, Berto, Ogier) to 'expose' it, the '13' never once assumes a recognisable shape—in the dialogue or on the screen.

Spectre begins by pretending to tell us four separate stories at once. We watch two theatre groups rehearsing *Prometheus Bound* (directed by Lonsdale) and *Seven Against Thebes* (a collective), and also observe Léaud and Berto—two rather crazed and curious loners, each of whom tricks strangers in cafés out of money. (Léaud impersonates a deaf-mute; Berto usually starts by flirting.) For the first thirty-five shots—ten of them black-and-white stills accompanied by an electronic hum—Rivette cuts between these four autonomous units, establishing no plot connections. The only links set up are occasional formal repetitions: a scene echoed by a subsequent still, two pans in separate shots of Léaud and Berto in their rooms. Even within each unit, many shots are either 'too long' or 'too short' to be conventionally assimilable as narrative. Rivette often cuts in the middle of a sentence or a movement, and the missing pieces are not always recuperated. Conversely, a shot in which Léaud's concierge reminds him to leave his key ends irrelevantly with her walking away from the camera, and sitting down at a table to write. Like some of the cryptic stills punctuating later portions of the film, such a diversion proposes—without ever substantiating—yet another supplementary fiction.

Then almost miraculously, in the 36th shot, two of the four 'plots' are brought together: Léaud is suddenly handed a slip of paper by a member of the theatre collective. On it is typed a seemingly coded message which he sets out to decipher, along with a subsequent message he receives, following clues provided by references to Balzac and 'The Hunting of the Snark' (the former gracefully explained by Eric Rohmer in a cameo role). And when Léaud's deductions eventually lead him to a hippy boutique called 'l'Angle du hasard', the 'plot' appreciably thickens: the boutique is run by Ogier, whom we later discover is a friend of both Lonsdale and Michèle Moretti, another member of the collective; and all three are members of the alleged '13'.

Meanwhile Berto, the fourth narrative strand, has been making some unwitting connections of her own. After stealing letters from the flat of Doniol-Valcroze (another one of the '13', along with his wife, Françoise Fabian) for the purpose of possible blackmail, she dons a wig and arranges a meeting with Fabian: an incongruous match suggesting Mickey Rooney versus Rohmer's Maud. Then, when she fails to collect money, she turns up at the boutique to try the same ploy with Ogier.

This second encounter marks the fusion of all four 'plots', and occurs just before the film's intermission. It is the only time Berto and Léaud ever cross paths (they are the only important characters who never meet), and the spectator may well feel at this point that he is finally being led out of chaos. But the second half of *Spectre*, after drawing the four strands together more tightly, proceeds to unravel them again; and the final hour leaves us as much in the dark as we were in the first.

Indeed, the delivery of the first message to Léaud is totally gratuitous, an act that is never explained, and most of the other 'connections' are brought about by equally expedient contrivances. In a country house

Opposite: Jean-Pierre Léaud in 'Out 1' *Spectre*; Dominique Labourier in 'Céline et Julie vont en bateau'

occupied at various times by Lafont, Lonsdale, Ogier and Moretti, Rivette parodies the very notion of 'hidden meaning' in a subtler way, by making sure that a single nondescript bust with no acknowledged relation to the 'plot' is visible in every room. It even crops up in the locked room possibly inhabited by Igor, Ogier's missing husband, a room she enters only near the end of the film. Obviously the bust is a joke; but why is it there? To suggest a *complot*. And according to the tactics of *Spectre*, suggesting a *complot* is at once an absurdity and a necessity: it leads us nowhere except forward.

Complot, in short, becomes the motivation behind a series of transparent gestures: spectres of action playing over a void. We watch actors playing at identity and meaning the way that children do, with many of the games leading to dead ends or stalemates, some exhausting themselves before they arrive anywhere, and still others creating solid roles and actions that dance briefly in the theatre of the mind before dissolving into something else. Nothing remains fixed, and everything becomes ominous. Relentlessly investigated by Léaud and blindly exploited by Berto, the spectre of the '13' reactivates the paranoia of its would-be members, mainly increasing the distances between them. Other crises intervene (a stranger runs off with the money of an actor in the collective; Ogier threatens to publish the intercepted letters); fear begets fear; both theatre groups disperse; Ogier and Moretti are last seen driving off to meet the perpetually missing Igor; and Berto and Léaud are each returned to their isolation. Repeated 'empty' shots of Place d'Italie in the final reel—chilling mixtures of Ozu-like emptiness with Langian terror—embody this growing sense of void, which ultimately widens to swallow up everything else in the film.

Much as *folie à deux* figures centrally in *L'Amour Fou* and *Céline et Julie vont en bateau*, failed *folie à deux* gradually becomes the very essence of *Spectre*. The inability to 'connect' reveals itself as part and parcel of the incapacity to sustain fictions, a failure registering most poignantly in the relationship of Ogier and Léaud, which begins with mutual attraction and ends in estrangement. Of all the 'two-part inventions' in *Spectre*, theirs is the richest in shifting tensions, and the growing rift is brilliantly underlined by the staging of their scenes in the boutique—particularly when they're stationed in adjoining rooms on opposite sides of the screen, each vying in a different way for our attention. This spatial tension reaches its climax in their last scene together, on the street, when Ogier forcibly breaks away and Léaud mimes the invisible barrier between them by pushing at it in agonised desperation, finally wandering in a diagonal trajectory out of the frame while blowing a dissonant wail on his harmonica.

'It didn't work,' he feebly confesses in the film's final shot, after repeatedly trying to make his Eiffel tower trinket swing back and forth exactly thirteen times. Speaking for the audience and the other actors/characters as well as for Rivette and himself, he is testifying to the impossibility of a sustained pattern or meaning. On the

deepest level, he is expressing an anguished agnosticism towards *all* fiction, directing a frightened stare into the face of intractable reality.

An infernal machine programmed to arouse narrative expectations in order to frustrate them, begin stories in order to contradict or cancel them, *Spectre* cruelly exposes the artifices of cinematic fiction by revealing many of the precise ways that they play on our reflexes. The scenes of violence that figure in the second half—Ogier's murder of a messenger (played by the film's producer!) and the brutal beating of Berto by a leather jacket named Marlon—are especially disturbing in this respect. They perform the ritualistic role of supplying 'action' and 'excitement' at junctures when we probably feel that they're most sorely needed, yet the reasons for these actions are so enigmatic that they fulfil no other visible function.

Even more than Rivette's other features, *Spectre* is built around a series of profound contradictions. Its apparent subject and substance is group effort, yet what it finally conveys is entropy and isolation. The extraordinary freedom of the shooting is counteracted by the aggressive constraint of the montage. One could reproach the film for having either 'too little' or 'too

'Out 1 Spectre': Françoise Fabian and Juliet Berto ('Mickey Rooney versus Rohmer's Maud'); Michel Lonsdale; the last scene between Jean-Pierre Léaud and Bulle Ogier



much'—a paradox reflected in the title, which suggests all colours (spectrum) as well as none (the transparency of a ghost). Without proposing any sort of influence, it is interesting to compare the title of *Gravity's Rainbow*, another recent work oscillating between form and formlessness, plotting and chaos, a compulsive desire to control the world and an equally strong desire to leave it alone—a novel, in fact, that proceeds to tie and untie its strands with a similar duplicity of purpose and diffusion of focus.

Before editing *Spectre*, Rivette spoke in a *Le Monde* interview of wanting to make it 'not a digest of the long version, but another film having its own logic: closer to a puzzle or a crossword game, playing less on affectivity and more on rhymes or oppositions, ruptures or connections, caesuras or censorship.' But it is a game that one submits to rather than plays, for it offers no chances of winning. One can sit before it as though at a tribunal—facing an Inquisition that repeatedly asks 'Why?'—or one can watch it like network television, and ignore the contradictions as if they were commercial breaks, viewing it all as pure spectacle. Or—likelier still, alas—one can get caught between these two possibilities, and intermittently become bored. A do-it-yourself kit, *Spectre* has no singular experience to convey, but a set of raw materials. Like Léaud in the film, we can concoct plenty of formulas out of them. A submerged history of the splinterings and disaffections of *Cahiers du Cinéma* after 1968? A film as steeped in silences as certain works by Webern? A semi-Sadean exposure of a lot of personal traits that actors generally seek to hide, particularly uncertainty and fear? Or a flight into the unknown seeking no 'success' or predetermined destination, only adventure?

Spectre isn't easy going for anyone, nor was it intended to be. Leaving its audience and its actors each suspended over a void, it offers itself as a dead-end experiment that can be neither emulated nor repeated—although it certainly will be learned from for years to come. Going further in self-annihilating narrative than any director before him, Rivette has burned up all the ground beneath his feet.

2

All in the golden afternoon
Full leisurely we glide;
For both our oars, with little skill,
By little arms are plied,
While little hands make vain pretence
Our wanderings to guide.

Alice in Wonderland

Without, the frost, the blinding snow,
The storm wind's moody madness—
Within, the firelight's ruddy glow
And childhood's nest of gladness.
The magic words shall hold thee fast:
Thou shalt not heed the raving blast.

Through the Looking Glass

Céline et Julie vont en bateau is like a picnic thrown on one of the sections of this charred terrain: a Mad Tea Party with a colourful crazy-quilt tablecloth, loony guests, inspired after-dinner games, and plenty of sweets to eat. Try to catch hold of it and it hurtles ahead like the White Rabbit, and down into

a nostalgic burrow where dreams and memory play. More than any other Rivette work, it is about the cinema—what it's like to watch and what it's like to create. Unlike *La Nuit Américaine*, it pursues this subject only by analogy and through evocation.

Ostensibly, the film is about Julie (Dominique Labourier), a librarian with a taste for magic books and Tarot cards, and Céline (Juliet Berto), a cabaret magician whom she first encounters hurrying past her in the opening scene. The initial setting is Montmartre, and the central action comprises the daily visits paid in turn by each girl to a haunted house, from which she emerges looking ravished and stunned, with a piece of candy on her tongue and no memory of what transpired inside—until she eats the candy, which affords an immediate (if scrambled) playback of a Victorian melodrama featuring a little girl named Madlyn, her widower father Olivier (Barbet Schroeder, the movie's producer), two scheming ladies named Camille (Bulle Ogier) and Sophie (Marie-France Pisier) and Miss Angèle, Madlyn's nurse, who is played alternately by Céline or Julie.

To encapsulate the film's point of departure in two over-crowded sentences is to point up its outlandishness, but not the spirited fluidity with which it is made to happen on a screen. As Rivette indicates in the accompanying interview, the candy plays an analogous role to the use of Balzac in *Spectre*—a narrative mechanism designed to permit passageway between separate fictional worlds. But while the separate worlds of *Spectre* tend to contradict or cancel one another, the double plot of *Céline et Julie* does precisely the reverse: the two girls in Montmartre clearly generate the story in the house, just as surely as the strange happenings there spawn and enrich the antics of their life outside. And if the scepticism towards fiction in *Spectre* leads to transparent actions playing over a void, *Céline et Julie* is like a game of catch played over the same void, with the ball tossed back and forth remaining solid as long as it is kept in motion.

The presence of another, contiguous world lying just beyond the visible one is established in the opening shot. We watch Julie idly smoking on a park bench, and hear an offscreen rasping noise that seems momentarily threatening because it is still undefined. (The next shot reveals that she is drawing a circle on the ground with her foot.) Everything that follows works towards a related impression: Julie's red magic book, wind in the trees, the voices of unseen children, a cat darting from one bench to another before alighting gracefully on the ground and waiting—all create a mood of pregnant pause and magical suspension in which anything at all might happen. . .

At which point Céline appears, trailing sunglasses, a scarf and a wrap behind her. And as Julie takes off in pursuit, we have already embarked on an adventure that goes beyond the boundaries of everyday logic. For the chase is no ordinary event at all—with Céline ever so firmly leading Julie on, and both girls frequently slowing their flight down to a leisurely stroll. The direct sound punctuating their path through a very picturesque Montmartre is occasionally overlaid by incidental piano music. (Rouch



'Céline et Julie': Barbet Schroeder, Dominique Labourier, Nathalie Asnar, Marie-France Pisier

spiced with a dash of Minnelli?) Even the precise documentary look of their journey is casually subverted by certain controlled and flamboyant details, like a steady recurrence of the colour red—and more important, the beginning of a series of doublings, such as the fact that each girl takes off her shoes at a different stage in the pursuit.

Doubling is indeed an essential part of the film's structure, figuring between the two plots as well as between the two girls. Shortly after the chase, in the library where Julie works, we find the screen split between the girls in unacknowledged proximity (recalling scenes with Léaud and Ogier in *Spectre*): in the background, Céline traces her hand in a children's book with a red Magic Marker, while in the foreground Julie makes red fingerprints with an inking pad. Much later, the traumatic climax of the story in the haunted house shows Madlyn smothered in bed, with the mark of a bloody hand imprinted on her pillow; and the cast of a red hand is one of the many playthings bandied about in Julie's flat. One might say, in short, that in the course of the film all four women are caught literally red-handed in the act of plotting.

After the library scene, we find Julie back in the park (the children visible this time), where she chants a magic spell, closes her eyes, and the camera cuts—to Julie again in long shot. Then she returns to her flat, encounters Céline on the stairs, and ushers her in to let her take a shower and to bandage her bloody knee. (Both these acts are later 'doubled': Julie takes a shower, and Miss Angèle attends to a wound on Camille's hand.) Céline launches at once into one of her preposterous tall tales, about tigers and pygmies, and soon after she alludes to a mysterious house, Julie begins to help by supplying some of the details. ('And the women—were they dark or fair?' 'Both. Dark and fair.')

And the next morning, before Julie sets off for the house in question, it is she and not Céline who comes up with the address. (To confound causality further, a snapshot of the house is subsequently discovered in Julie's trunk.) Similarly, it is Céline who

turns up to meet Gilou, Julie's absurdly romantic boyfriend from Brittany—a rather pathetic figure who apparently needs to be dispensed with in order to clear the way for Olivier, his novelistic counterpart, who boasts a comparably Heathcliffian profile. Offhandedly exchanging roles and lives as well as clothes, each heroine sets off for the house on alternate days, to be admitted into—and then, just as mysteriously, ejected from—the fiction inside. Along with the relationship between the girls, this experience has implied erotic overtones: a sort of narrative rape that can be recollected only in tranquillity with the aid of the candy, usually by both girls together, in achronological *Marienbad*-like fragments.

As they suck on the sweets in Julie's flat and react to the fractured replays of this 19th century pastiche, they explicitly become movie spectators—laughing, shrieking, yawning, musing and dreamily extemporising on whatever they see. (This 'film-within-a-film' even has a title of its own, *Phantom Ladies Over Paris*, which appears in the main credits.) The screen transforms itself into a mirror, their laughter and amazement fuses with ours, and in the netherworld between film and spectator, dreaming and waking, a collaborative enterprise of creating spectacle as well as watching it begins to take shape. Recalled like shards of a dream, the inner plot requires creative participation in order to become legible, and we assist in this act of completion along with the girls.

At the centre of this splendidly murky intrigue are Camille and Sophie, each plotting against the other with poisoned candy or flowers to murder Madlyn, and thereby become eligible to marry Olivier, who made a vow to his late wife not to remarry as long as their daughter lives. Camille, a somewhat faded daisy of the Blanche DuBois species, is glimpsed fluttering down a staircase or appearing in portals like Camilla Horn in Murnau's *Faust*, uttering crazed lines like 'I'm leaving you the roses because of their thorns' and—when Miss Angèle is removing flowers from Madlyn's room—'Why this violence?'



'Céline et Julie': Dominique Labourier, Marie-France Pisier, Juliet Berto.
Below: Labourier and Berto

Sophie, an elegant enigma who hides pieces of candy in a small cupboard, plays games with Madlyn and inexplicably gasps at the sight of the flower she draws.

Each time the events are recalled, the plot is 'advanced' or complicated a bit more. But it doesn't take on its most ghoulish aspects until the girls decide to enter the house together. This time, the pallor of the other principals is a ghostly greasypaint white—recalling the cold cream on Céline's face in the cabaret dressing room—and when Camille cuts her hand on a broken wineglass, she bleeds a ghastly blue. The entire intrigue becomes a frozen theatrical tableau, as Céline and Julie in their giddy waking states project their girlish games into and around the gloomy proceedings—blowing their lines as they take turns enacting Miss Angèle, clamorously mocking the behaviour of the ghosts (or beautifully parodying Olivier's narcissism in a 'mirror' dumbshow); in general, behaving like some insane derivation of Abbott and Costello having improbably stumbled into a tale by Henry James.

The confrontation is as unsettling and mind-bending as a comic nightmare out of Buñuel, but it ends in exorcism. Céline and Julie escape from the house with Madlyn, shifting the balance between the two plots; and all three, finding themselves back in Julie's flat, decide to embark on a boat ride. Gliding down a placid river like fugitives from a Renoir film, they come upon the immobile figures of Olivier, Sophie and Camille, drifting past in another boat. Reassembled more symmetrically, the fictions diverge to go their separate ways; and we cut to Céline on the self-same park bench, opening her eyes to spy Julie hurrying past. The doubles are doubled, the circle is complete; and we're left with the inquisitive stare and implied Cheshire grin of a mysterious cat.

Once again, Rivette is playing on a contrast of acting styles—chiefly the animated cartoon comportment of Berto (in her richest performance to date) and the theatrical

aggressiveness of Labourier. Improvisation still dictates much of the overall texture, but it is conducted within much narrower limits than in *Spectre*, closer to a 'jazz chart' than an open-ended experiment like Coleman's.

The *ambiance* is rather like a retrospective of old *Cahiers* favourites: movie memories reflected as formal diagrams of the appreciations of certain directors by Rivette and many of his colleagues in the 1950s. Thus the elaborate doublings of shots and characters seem partially derived from the discovery of such structures in Hitchcock by Truffaut and Godard (although it is Hitchcock with the causality removed); the retreats into childhood in Hawks' *Monkey Business* and the wild dream-creations of Tashlin's *Artists and Models* are reproduced in spirit, if not in letter; and other enthusiasms of that period abound, from Mizoguchi and Rossellini to Nicholas Ray and Cocteau.

Indeed, one of the more pleasing aspects of *Céline et Julie* is the way that it clarifies and helps to redefine much of the cinema that inspired it. A recent Paris revival of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* offers a perfect case in point. Seeing this fifties musical again after *Céline et Julie* reveals how even the garish

cartoon-like simplicity of one of Hawks' more bloated efforts can accommodate a formal play of exchanges between the leading ladies that is far from simple—the implacable reality of Jane Russell and the sheer mythos of Marilyn co-existing, colliding, connecting, communicating, setting up contrasts, reversals and fusions with one another beneath and through the established musical comedy conventions. *Céline et Julie*, by exploring some of the same parameters in a quite different context, illuminates the potential richness of such a film behind its various commercial disguises, throwing up a rich and ravishing jewel box of possibilities.

Consider again the relationship of Berto and Labourier: the 'unreal' plastic inventiveness of the former, the assertive psychodrama of the latter. Pointing up the differences, the doublings insure that each fulfil the other's roles, immediately creating sparks and frictions—as in Labourier's powerful (if ear-curdling) cabaret number, which quickly gravitates into an assault on the audience (like Russell's courtroom impersonation of Monroe in *Blondes*), simultaneously releasing and bearing witness to much of the competitive tension that her performance has previously accumulated.

All Rivette's features might be regarded as different kinds of horror films; *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* is his first horror-comedy. The anxiety and despair of *Paris Nous Appartient* and *La Religieuse*, *L'Amour Fou* and *Spectre* seem relatively absent, yet they perpetually hover just beyond the edges of the frames. We still have no privileged base of 'reality' to set against the fictions, each of which is as outrageous as the other; and along with Borges, we can't really say whether it's a man dreaming he's a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he's a man—although we may feel, in either case, that he and we are just on the verge of waking. It's a sham, of course—as a spectator complains of Céline's magic act, before being forcibly evicted from the cabaret—but a sublimely delicious one. As long as the separate fictions interpenetrate, we can stay balanced on Rivette's precarious tightrope, and don't have to worry about a net not being there to catch us if we fall. Improvising along with the actors, we look straight ahead and join in the crazy fun, trying to forget that beneath us lies the frightening knowledge of *Spectre*—that terrible certainty of a long drop that knows no bottom at all. ■



JACQUES RIVETTE

interviewed by Carlos Clarens, Edgardo Cozarinsky

With your three most recent films—*L'Amour Fou*, *Out 1* and *Céline et Julie vont en bateau*—one feels that you are becoming progressively more and more interested in the actors.

JACQUES RIVETTE: When I began making films my point of view was that of a *cinéphile*, so my ideas about what I wanted to do were abstract. Then, after the experience of my first two films, I realised I had taken the wrong direction as regards methods of shooting. The cinema of *mise en scène*, where everything is carefully preplanned and where you try to ensure that what is seen on the screen corresponds as closely as possible to your original plan, was not a method in which I felt at ease or worked well. What bothered me from the outset, after I had finally managed to finish *Paris Nous Appartient* with all its tribulations, was what the characters said, the words they used. I had written the dialogue beforehand with my co-writer Jean Gruault (though I was ninety per cent responsible) and then it was reworked and pruned during shooting, as the film otherwise would have run four-and-a-half hours. The actors sometimes changed a word here and there, as always happens in films, but basically the dialogue was what I had written—and I found it a source of intense embarrassment. So much so that when I began work on *La Religieuse*, which was a project that took quite a while to get off the ground, I determined this time to use what was basically a pre-existing text.

***La Religieuse* is your only film adapted from a literary source—and a classic into the bargain.**

What attracted us to the Diderot novel was that the text is highly wrought and very theatrical. Diderot wrote it two years after his two major plays, *Le Père de Famille* and *Le Fils Naturel*, and it's completely bound up with those plays. In its sensibility, its use of language, it reveals the same theatrical perspective. In his letters, Diderot speaks of scenes, views, images in connection with *La Religieuse*, all of which encouraged us to make the film. In Diderot's mind it was something very theatrical, very visual, and in effect it is composed of big scenes. We only added some five little scenes to serve as transitions; our main task was pruning, because if we had retained all the material in the novel, the film would have run five hours. Actually, our first adaptation of *La Religieuse* would have made a three-hour film. There were several successive stages. Jean Gruault had been an actor, though without any real vocation for it. He wanted to write plays, and during the editing of *Paris Nous Appartient* he brought me the first draft of a stage adaptation of *La*

Religieuse. 'La Religieuse is really a play,' he told me. And, 'while I was writing the play, I was thinking it would be even better as a film.' We staged a production at the Studio des Champs Elysées, with Anna Karina. It wasn't so much a play as a sort of compromise, a bastard enterprise based on the script which the two of us had written in the meantime.

In retrospect, *La Religieuse* looks like a transitional work. You are still using post-synchronisation in it, for instance.

Direct sound was impossible for that film. I'm very fond of accents, but with Francisco Rabal you couldn't understand a word. *La Religieuse* again dissatisfied me when I'd finished it. The project had been so long in preparation that even during shooting, when we finally got that far, I found myself irritated as well as disillusioned by the whole thing. The text had been so written and rewritten and revised, and I knew it so thoroughly by heart, that I realised I was no longer really listening to the actors. Changing anything during shooting was out of the question: we had done all the condensing possible during the process of adaptation, and the text had become the Bible! And there were material problems, because this was a pseudo-expensive film, a pseudo-big production: once the actors and technicians had been taken care of, there wasn't very much money left to make the picture. Since I found myself inattentive to the production and not listening to the actors, I realised this was not a method of filming that interested me.

After *La Religieuse*, I made a programme for the television series 'Cinéma de Notre Temps'. Jean Renoir, *Le Patron* was very simply shot, because at the time Renoir was already beginning to have difficulty in getting about. After two or three days shooting, I realised that the best thing to do was to sit down facing him and ask questions, and then show films. So the filming was super-simple and the fifteen day schedule was one long conversation—not just the part we filmed, but our talks in between times during the days we spent in Provence, in the village where his father is buried, and in the place where he filmed *La Règle du Jeu*. Afterwards came three months of editing with Jean Eustache, during which we looked at all the material again and at quite a few films, trying to find an approach which would be—I'm not talking about results but the method—roughly speaking Renoir's own or Jean Rouch's.

That was when I began to want to try the experiment of *L'Amour Fou*. The film began as a sort of gamble by Georges de Beauregard. He needed to make films to keep his production company going, and



Acting for Rivette. Eric Rohmer in 'Out 1'; directors Barbet Schroeder (centre) and Jean Eustache (bottom picture) in 'Céline et Julie'

one day he asked if I had anything in mind that wouldn't cost too much. I suggested *L'Amour Fou*, and there was no argument because it was something that could be shot in five weeks with a small cast and a minimum crew. Afterwards, he wasn't too pleased to be presented with a film two or three times the length he wanted. So we didn't do him much good, but I was delighted to have been able to make it.

From *L'Amour Fou* onwards, the script seems to be just a formality for you, something that can be shown to a producer or to the Centre du Cinéma.

Not only for me; a lot of directors are moving in the same direction. This has become more evident over the last ten years or so, because there are now cameras enabling you to do things which were possible in the silent days but were practically impossible, unless you had the energy of a Renoir, during the first thirty years of the sound film. There is a persistent idea of a cinema partitioned off in tiers: first you look for a subject, then you write as detailed a script as possible, on the basis of which you find someone to put up the money, for

which purpose you pencil in the names of certain actors opposite fully defined characters. Once you have got all the elements together, often compromising some of your original ideas in the process, comes another stage: the actual shooting. You shoot little bits here and there, as meticulously as possible, and then you stick them together, and you're pleased if you end up with something that corresponds to what was described more or less in your two hundred typewritten pages. Personally I find all this a dreadful bore. I don't say that you can't make great films like this: Alain Resnais does and he seems perfectly at ease within this formula. But the system stifles me; in my idea of cinema, all the stages should be totally interacting.

I want to return, though with quite different methods, aims and end-products, to the old Dziga Vertov idea: that the montage should be conceived with the project and not merely with the exposed film. This may sound like a conceit, but you could say that the script is written in the montage, and that the montage is established before shooting. I have been going in this direction for three films now, in *L'Amour Fou* more than in *Céline et Julie*, and in *Out 1* most of all. I hate to have the feeling, either during the shooting or the editing, that everything is fixed and nothing can be changed. I reject the word 'script' entirely—at any rate in the usual sense. I prefer the old usage—usually scenario—which it had in the Commedia dell'Arte, meaning an outline or scheme: it implies a dynamism, a number of ideas and principles from which one can set out to find the best possible approach to the filming. I now prefer my shooting schedules to be as short as possible, and the editing to last as long as possible.

How did you happen on a structure so rigorous and yet so free as that of *Out 1*?

Originally the idea was to do four parallel *feuilleton* stories, linked at the beginning of each episode by still shots connecting with the other episodes, rather

like the old serials. We later abandoned this idea, but in the four-hour version we made use of black-and-white stills, either as a recall or an ellipse, a connection or a pause; in some cases the stills match with moments already seen, in others with scenes to come, occasionally with sequences that have been removed from this version entirely. In the thirteen-hour version, Jean-Pierre Léaud received his first message after four hours; in the four-hour version, he receives it after fifteen or twenty minutes. In the thirteen-hour version the plot got under way after four hours of documentary, both true and false, on the two theatrical groups: it was something of a documentary about the modern experimental theatre, a little Peter Brookish or Living Theatre. And there were bits about Juliet Berto and Jean-Pierre Léaud, who were the characters outside all this; you saw him distributing his envelopes, and her doing her bit of hustling. Then came the idea of connecting the four parallel stories. It was at this point that Juliet and Jean-Pierre began to function as go-betweens for the audience, each in his own way, by trying to discover the significance of scenes or sequences of events which are as yet meaningless.

The four-hour version is almost an abstract of the thirteen-hour one. There was, for instance, a second death—that of Juliet Berto. In the shorter version this has gone, allowing the open but none the less disturbing ending, where one feels that Bulle Ogier is going towards her doom.

Out 1 really took shape only in the month before shooting began, although we had discussed it in rather a vague way for some months with the four actors (Michel Lonsdale, Juliet Berto, Bulle Ogier, Michèle Moretti), and also rather more spasmodically with Léaud. We traced the path the film was to take a week before shooting began, because we needed some sort of outline to be able to plan the work and shoot the maximum footage in the minimum time. That was how we managed to shoot a

thirteen-hour film in six weeks. Afterwards, for the first cut, we joined the material more or less as a first assembly; basically the thirteen hours comprise a montage, deliberately rather loose, largely retaining the improvisational aspect, sometimes even including hesitations and repetitions, which hardly survives at all in the four-hour version.

In the thirteen-hour version there were very long sequences of pure reportage about the two groups of actors, and also moments of 'letting go', particularly where the camera was concerned: ten-minute takes of the actors left entirely to themselves and cracking up rather spectacularly. It became something of a psychodrama. Of course the thirteen-hour version was edited to some extent, but always trying to retain this 'first assembly' feeling. The main impulse behind *Out 1* was provided by a screening of the similar kind of montage Jean Rouch had made for his film *Petit à Petit*. It ran for eight hours and was totally different from the four-hour version Rouch made, theoretically for television, and the ninety-minute version shown in cinemas. I was so impressed by the original that I refused to see the shorter versions. Out of that—with disastrous consequences, as you know—came the thirteen-hour version of *Out 1*. We still don't know whether there will ever be enough money to make a print, although the negative must be in pretty good shape because it wasn't tampered with too much.

Why did you bring Balzac and *L'Histoire des Treize* into the film?

I hadn't even read *L'Histoire des Treize* at the time, but I thought it was something everybody would know, or that people would at least get the reference. Actually there is nothing sinister about the conspiracy; it's really more of a Utopian plot, the key to which is revealed by only one or two people: by Lonsdale, in the long scene by the river with Doniol-Valcroze, and to a certain extent by Françoise Fabian and Jean Bouise in their very long scene.

Léaud conjures these phantoms, rather as in *Céline et Julie vont en bateau*: through the incantation of letters, of words which he dissects, in analysing the texts of the messages.

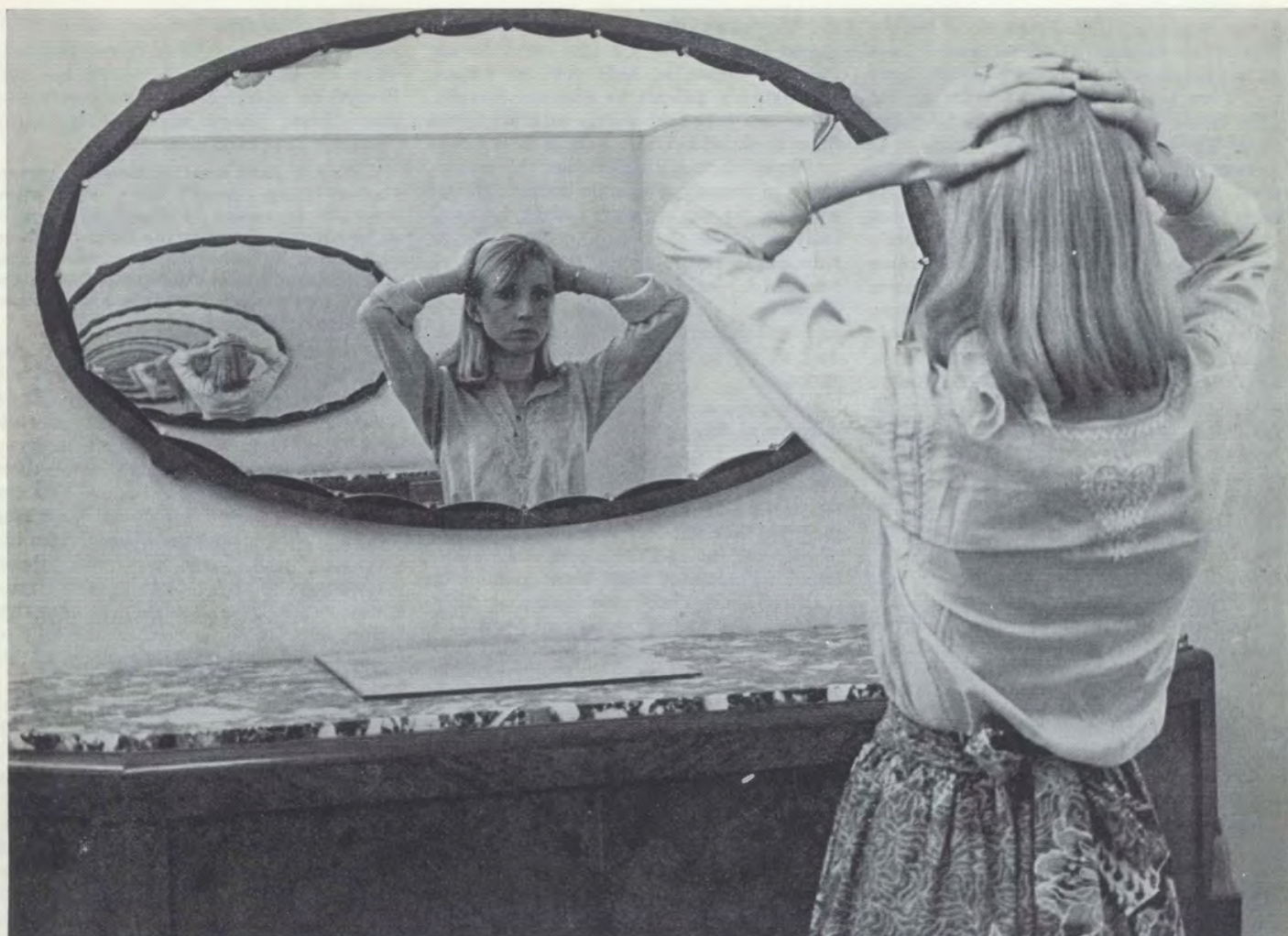
Léaud is an actor who goes all the way once you have suggested a direction to take. It was he who launched out down this track, somewhere between Balzac and Lewis Carroll. Bulle Ogier was busy with another film and just turned up to shoot her scenes. Lonsdale, on the other hand, was in attendance throughout and was interested in what was happening to the other characters when his own wasn't involved, so he had the key to the whole thing. But perhaps it was also because he is a director at heart, even though he hasn't directed anything yet.

The disparity between a rigorous overall structure and improvisation in detail, between documentary and vast conspiracy, rather suggests an unexpected reconciliation of Lang with Rossellini.

They are both film-makers I admire. In point of fact I think that *Phénix*, the script I wrote with Eduardo de Gregorio after *Out 1* and haven't been able to film yet, is an attempt to do something halfway between

'*Out 1*': 'something of a documentary about the modern experimental theatre'





'Out 1': Bulle Ogier in the room with the two mirrors

Murnau and Renoir. Actually, Rossellini had a hand in the genesis of *Paris Nous Appartient*. Around 1955-56 he was in Paris and wanted to produce a series of films by young directors. He asked some of us from the *Cahiers* group to put up projects. I remember there was Godard, who didn't do anything at all; Truffaut, who presented a rough draft of what was to become *Les quatre cents coups*; Chabrol, who was already working on the script for *Le beau Serge*, which he shot in 1957; and myself, with a theme somewhat derivative of *The Blackboard Jungle*, about racism and students of various nationalities within the setting of the Cité Universitaire. It was an extremely phoney script, because I projected a purely external view of the Cité, never having lived there myself, and also because I was rather under the influence of a particular area of American cinema, including Richard Brooks. Rossellini tore it to pieces pitilessly but quite justifiably, and I set to work with Jean Gruault on another script which luckily wasn't filmed either but out of which, more or less, came *Paris Nous Appartient*, which was also concerned with students and other outsiders. After that Rossellini left for India, and nothing came of these projects; but *Paris Nous Appartient* may perhaps be said to derive from the experience, if only as a reaction.

In *Out 1*, as in *Paris Nous Appartient*, there is a suggestion of obsession about characters who are marginal to the action: Betty Schneider in *Paris Nous Appartient*, Léaud and Berto in *Out 1*. In both cases

the setting is Paris, and both films end with an escape to nature, a nature by no means reassuring, with isolated house and water prominently featured—the Seine in *Paris Nous Appartient*, the sea in *Out 1*.

When we arrived at the house on the beach towards the end of shooting on *Out 1*, we had the feeling of stepping into a horror film complete with locked room, missing key and all the rest. Suzanne Schiffman,* Michel Lonsdale and I arrived the evening before shooting was due to begin to reconnoitre the possibilities, and I found myself faced with this house which was so much more interesting than I had expected. It was there, too, that we found the room with two mirrors opposite each other which Bulle enters near the end. We used these mirrors in the first place because they were there; but also because by then we had realised the considerable role played by mirrors in the material we had shot. We hadn't thought about this before starting: it was one of those things that happen as you go along. Actually, the element of obsession in *Paris Nous Appartient* only became apparent once the film had been edited. The ironical thing is that *Out 1*, which is about conspiracy and obsession, was shot in an atmosphere of complete relaxation, whereas *Céline et Julie*, a much sunnier and more amusing film, was beset by tensions and was very hard going—not only because it was the cameraman's first film (he did an excellent job), but because it had to be completed within a

four-week schedule, twenty working days.

How did you envisage the montage of *Out 1*?

The first cut, resulting in the thirteen-hour version, was done with Nicole Lubtchansky. Afterwards I felt I was no longer seeing what I was watching on the editing table, and I called in Denise de Casabianca, who shut herself up alone for a fortnight with the thirteen hours to get to know them. After that I began work with her on shaping the shorter version, which actually runs four hours and twenty minutes. Of course we didn't try to make a résumé of the thirteen hours, but to find material there for another film with its own rhythm and its own inner design.

While watching *Céline et Julie*, I was also thinking of *Comédie Policière* and the work of the TSE group.†

Yes, of course. There was a first stage, mostly involving Juliet Berto and Dominique Labourier—Eduardo de Gregorio too, but much less so—in which we tried to define the characters, then the whole beginning of the film, the way they meet each other. After that came a second stage in which we tried to find the shape the action would take.

*Suzanne Schiffman. Artistic adviser to Truffaut, Godard, Rivette, scriptwriter on *Out 1* and *La nuit américaine* among others, a major influence on French films since 1959.

†TSE. A basically Argentinian theatre troupe. Among their best-known productions: *Dracula*, *Goddess*, *L'Histoire du Théâtre*, *Comédie Policière*, *Luxe*.

Quite early on I felt I wanted to have a film-within-the-film. It's something I have often wanted to do, and I have one in *Phénix* too. Even before I knew what the second film would be about, I planned to use Bulle Ogier and Marie-France Pisier, so as to have a second couple not only acting this story but relating to the other pair. And there we got stuck for quite a time. At that point Eduardo began working more closely with us, innumerable ideas were thrown around, and gradually we narrowed it down to the Henry James story *The Other House*, which Eduardo knew and whose basic theme we used. I still haven't read it; it hasn't been translated into French. But we also borrowed from other James stories, in particular an early short story called *A Romance of Certain Old Clothes*. Some lines in the film are lifted direct from this story, notably in Bulle Ogier's speech about the trunk and the clothes kept stored in it during her first scene with Barbet Schroeder. Only four lines, but it amused Bulle and she wanted to say them.

During the credits for the film, 'Phantom Ladies over Paris' appears immediately after 'Céline et Julie vont en bateau', one in black on white, the other white on black, exactly like the names of the two 'pairs' of actresses. Does this imply that it is the negative of the 'positive' main title, or is it simply the name of the film-within-the-film?

When we discussed how the second film should be integrated with the first, we considered various possibilities. At one stage the idea was to go much further in fragmenting the second film, particularly in dispersing the various elements, letting the montage range freely, thus permitting a variety of different meanings. At this point, naturally, we thought of *Comédie Policière* and about a writer who has been much in view since *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad* (and even before): Adolfo Bioy Casares and his novel *The Invention of Morel*. Of course we knew all this existed—*Marienbad* and the TSE and *The Invention of Morel*—but we were trying to find a motif for ourselves which would be both similar to theirs and at the same time different; and we finally hit on the motif of the candy. After that everything progressed very rapidly. The candy—making all due allowances—played the role taken by *L'Histoire des Treize* in *Out 1*. We suddenly found the gimmick which enabled us to link all the elements—to provide on the one hand a mechanism for pulling the film together, and on the other something to hold the spectator's attention throughout.

For the beginning of the film, particularly everything to do with Montmartre in the first quarter of an hour, we had thought of presenting a sort of illusory Paris, something like the city you saw in American films of the Fifties like *An American in Paris*. But we would have needed more time—not more money, just time to look around while shooting—so it remained more an idea than an actuality in what we were able to shoot. We still had no final title. Someone said: 'If it was an American film, it would have been called *Phantom Ladies Over Paris*'; it became a sort of joke with us. But when the editing was finished, I wanted it to appear on the credits too. The way it is done makes it look as though it were the title of

the film-within-the-film. But if the film is shown in America, I'd like them to use the title *Céline et Julie vont en bateau*, although it's difficult to translate literally. *Céline and Julie take a Trip* suggests something to do with LSD. *Take a Boat* might be better, although this misses the significance in French of *vont en bateau*. *Monter en bateau* is to tell someone a rather involved story and have them believe you; *aller en bateau* is to be caught up in a story you're being told—which is relevant because Céline and Julie tell each other stories and believe these stories. They embark on their own fiction: hence the shot of the boat at the end.

How did you decide which actress should play which role?

We were a little undecided at first. We felt they could swap roles if they liked, but actually it was better that they should play the parts they did. But that's why I wanted to keep for the end the rather facile effect Hitchcock has used many times, notably in *Strangers on a Train*, which suggests they could have played the other two parts. It's a conventional effect to end what is after all a conventional film. Julie is a wholly sensible character. In fact the film is something which happens to Julie: she's a character with her own inner psychology, possessing a past, a present and even a future, as is suggested by implication in her meeting with Gilou, her girlhood fiancé; everything that happens to her is linked to her own imagination. Céline, on the other hand, is purely exterior, a behaviourist character, who is really seen from Julie's point of view. We are really with Julie, receiving flashes about Céline; there are some when Julie isn't present, but they are all flashes of comedy, of exhibition—the scene with Gilou, the conversation with her friends from the theatre.

Where everything is fantasy with Céline it is memory with Julie. For instance, the photograph found in the trunk which heralds the appearance of the mysterious house. This was the failure of the film version of *The Turn of the Screw*, where Deborah Kerr was given a sort of get out, in that it is after finding a photograph of Quint and Miss Jessel that she begins to 'see' them.

All I remember about *The Innocents* is how silly I found it, psychologising everything to death, turning the governess so blatantly into a neurotic. Of course you can read James that way, but who is to say that ghosts don't exist? *The Nightcomers*, although extremely badly made, had a much more subtle theme. Nevertheless I think that Henry James, like Bioy Casares, is unfilmable. They are authors who can be filmed diagonally, taking up their themes, but never literally. A few days ago I saw the Italian adaptation of *The Invention of Morel*; an unimaginably obvious, dreadfully literal illustration of the book. It's incredible how anyone could make such a dull film out of that marvellous novel, where the things that work in the book as words on the page simply won't transfer to the screen, even if, as the director claims, he tried to transpose from first person narrative to third. It simply doesn't work at all. The adaptation should have been much more ruthless, even a betrayal in the sense that Hitchcock betrayed Boileau and Narcejac

for *Vertigo*—a film I thought about while watching *The Invention of Morel*, especially when the hero began to spy on his wife. Everything should have been reconstructed from there; above all, the mechanism shouldn't have been revealed.

***Céline et Julie vont en bateau* suggests another Bioy Casares story even more than *The Invention of Morel*, *El Perjurio de la Nieve**, in which the hero comes to an isolated house where the same actions and the same words are repeated day after day to arrest time, and it is his presence that breaks the spell.**

I haven't read much of Bioy Casares. Contrary to what people think, I'm not particularly well read. But Eduardo knew that story and told me a bit about it while we were working. With this type of fiction—semi Anglo-Saxon, semi Argentinian—there are only two things you can do. You can borrow the mechanism to do something different, or you can take a kernel from the plot and start rebuilding from there, jettisoning the entire original mechanism. I was struck by this while watching that Italian film the other evening: the folly of trying to make a literal transposition of this sort of fiction.

When *Paris Nous Appartient* came out, several people found comparisons with Borges. Admittedly you see a book by Borges on the heroine's table in the opening shot. But this was simply because Suzanne Schiffman, who was the assistant on the film, happened to be reading it. We needed a book on the table, we saw the title *Enquêtes (Otras Inquisiciones)* and thought it suited the film quite well, so on to the table it went. Anyway, two or three critics referred to Borges, no doubt because of that shot.

So I then began to read Borges, and of course found him magnificent. For quite a while I wanted to do something with *Theme of the Traitor and the Hero*—this was well before Bertolucci's *Spider's Stratagem*, at a time when I couldn't get *La Religieuse* off the ground and was trying to set up something else—and for six months I struggled to construct a script from this story. I tried to fit all the levels of the Borges story into my adaptation, until I got lost in my own labyrinth and finally said 'It's unfilmable'. Later I saw Bertolucci's film, which I like very much, and as I see it he too abandoned any attempt to film Borges. *The Spider's Stratagem* tells another story, in the middle of which is told the 'Theme of the Traitor and the Hero'. What I wanted above all was to retain the last sentence,† which—as always with Borges—hints at the possibility of quite a different story. ■

**El Perjurio de la Nieve* was the basis for Leopoldo Torre Nilsson's first feature—*El Crimen de Oribe*, 1950, co-directed with his father Leopoldo Torres Rios.

†Translation, by James E. Irby, of the last paragraph of Borges' story: 'In Nolan's work, the passages imitated from Shakespeare are the least dramatic; Ryan suspects that the author interpolated them so that in the future someone might hit upon the truth. He understands that he too forms part of Nolan's plot. . . After a series of tenacious hesitations, he resolves to keep his discovery silent. He publishes a book dedicated to the hero's glory; this too, perhaps, was foreseen.' (*Labyrinths*, Penguin Books, 1970)

SPAIN: OUT OF THE PAST



Roger Mortimore

'The Spirit of the Beehive'

There has been continuous discussion in Spain since February 12th of the significance of the policy statement made by Arias Navarro, President of the government after the assassination of Carrero Blanco in December 1973. The core of Navarro's speech was the *apertura* or 'opening', already an overworked phrase in Spain but one which promises, eventually, political parties, and before that greater freedom for the arts and mass media. This has already affected the Spanish film industry in two ways: a decrease in censorship, and the banning of the making of 'double versions' of films—a practice which arose because producers could earn more for the sale of their films abroad the more female nudity the movies contained; and since such films could not be shown to Spanish audiences, two versions were made.

Foreign films, like Visconti's *Vaghe Stelle dell'Orsa* and Wajda's *The Birch Wood*, have been passed uncut, but with their distribution restricted to the Salas Especiales, the art houses set up in 1967, which may not contain more than five hundred seats. Films destined for exhibition in the Salas Especiales, most of which are in Madrid and Barcelona, have always been subject to a lesser degree of censorship because they are seen by smaller audiences. (The same practice occurs in publishing; expensive editions have fewer cuts than cheap editions.) Boorman's *Deliverance* was

also passed uncut, and ran for three weeks in a Sala Especial in Madrid before being seized by the police. The ensuing excisions included the whole of the sexual assault scene. Russell's *The Music Lovers* suffered only minimal cuts, which made the scene on the train more erotic than Russell intended.

Of course the reduction in censorship will mean little if it is simply a question of more nudity. What is needed is the freedom to treat important subjects without restraint. There are directors waiting in the wings: Angelino Fons, for instance, who since his first film *La Busca* (1966), an impressive

version of Baroja's novel, has directed almost solely bread-and-butter films, waiting until it is possible for him to deal freely with subjects like the Civil War and the Burgos Trial. If he did not make commercial films he might have to abandon his chosen profession.

Earlier, directors of promise during the Second Republic like Sáenz de Heredia, who made *Patricio miró a una estrella* (1934) and two films with Buñuel for Filmófono, in the 1940s made Triumphalist films (like *Raza*, plot by Francisco Franco) similar to those produced in Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy. Of course films about the Civil War have been legion, but it is only in the last year that two have appeared with any pretensions to honesty and artistic merit. These are Víctor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive*, a notable indictment of what Franco's rebellion unleashed psychologically on Spain, and Carlos Saura's *La Prima Angélica*, which observes the effect of the war on day-to-day domestic life.

The Spirit of the Beehive, the first Spanish picture to win the Concha de Oro at San



'The Spirit of the Beehive'

Sebastian, is also the first film to reflect the sadness and frustration attendant on Franco's victory in 1939, an event which partakes of the character of Cardinal Newman's 'aboriginal calamity'. The postwar mood is conveyed not in concrete details or facts but through the sadness of the landscape, the whisper of the dialogue, the shadows in which people move, the pervasive silence. All this suggests the devastating impact of the war. *The Spirit of the Beehive* is also the first film to deal with the men who fought without knowing why, whose choice of sides was determined by the events in the area where they happened to be on July 18th, 1936; who spent three years killing without reason and who then returned to their wives and children, but returned with something destroyed; men who harbour only a huge emptiness. Such a man is the father in Erice's film, played by Fernando Fernán Gómez. During the Second Republic he was an aspiring intellectual (there is a photograph of him with Ortega y Gasset and Unamuno). Now he devotes himself to apiculture and to a journal, meditations on bees. Like his present life, the journal is an evasion, a result of the shock which produced passive complicity in the realisation of Franco's regime. This is comment enough on the rift in Spanish culture occasioned by the Civil War.

The father's evasions, his failure, are made evident in the scene in which he takes his daughters, Ana and Isabel, to a wood to look for toadstools. After explaining that there are good and bad toadstools, as the mother has told Ana that there are good and bad spirits—a Manicheism irreprehensible if one accepts that the war was won by the 'bad' side and lost by the 'good' side—he reveals that the best toadstools are in a nearby cloud-flecked mountain. He says he hasn't been there; *estamos tan flojos*, 'we're so feeble,' but he says that one day he will take them there. But of course he never will.

The family live in a large house, barely furnished, suggesting the soldiers' practice of burning books and furniture, in a village on the bleak Castilian plateau, a village now

flanked, like every other, by the Falange symbol of yoke and arrows. Not the least of the film's merits is that it gets Castile right in its drabness. For the year is 1940 and the isolation of the village mirrors both the isolation inside the family and the isolation of Spain, evinced when Fernando listens to foreign news on his crystal set at night and one is made aware of the Second World War in progress beyond the Pyrenees, the war from which the Pyrenees seal off Spain, the war adumbrated in the magazine called *Mundo*, a soldier on its cover, which Fernando receives by post.

Teresa (Teresa Gimpera), Fernando's wife, writes letters to a child adopted in the war who is now in a Red Cross camp in France and whom she forlornly hopes to see again. This is her pretext for leaving the house, the 'beehive', the introverted, self-contained existence of the family. It is from this world that her daughter Ana tries to escape through her belief in spirits. Teresa bicycles through the desolate landscape to a tiny railway station with a broken platform clock where she posts the letter in a train that slowly bears away slumped, staring men. The war alone is not responsible for the couple's predicament, but the war has produced it by encouraging certain tendencies; for is there not a photograph inscribed by the young Teresa to Fernando, 'To my dear misanthrope'? The film shows how the behaviour of the parents affects the children. The film is about the parents, who have suffered the war. It is not a film about children.

Ana and Isabel, aged six and seven, attend a screening of James Whale's *Frankenstein* in the village hall. The younger girl accepts the existence of spirits and is encouraged in this, maliciously by Isabel and nonchalantly by her mother ('A spirit is a spirit. With good little girls they're good, but with bad little girls they're bad'). And when Ana's spirit comes, summoned by her, it is in the form of a *maquis* on the run who jumps off a train and plunges across a field at dawn. For Ana, as for her mother, the train is a symbol of hope, of freedom from the 'beehive', the sound of its whistle at night a magic casement. Erice

has suggested that Mary Shelley created *Frankenstein* because she lacked a father; Ana's belief in spirits arises for the same reasons. And the fact that this belief is engendered by seeing a film reflects the Spanish addiction to the cinema in the 1940s, when films provided the unique escape from the reality of hunger and the black market and forced labour camps.

The subtlety of the film lies in its use of the telling power of an image and the sparse dialogue, combined with a score which incorporates traditional Castilian children's songs. The subtlety of the silence is evident for instance in the brief scene where Teresa lifts the lid of a piano and plays a few out-of-tune notes; or in the sequence that begins at night with the shooting of the *maquis*. Then the Guardia Civil sergeant is shaving and one notices his hands, the hands responsible for the death of Ana's spirit. Fernando arrives at the barracks and is taken to see the body of the *maquis*, which is laid out in the village hall where *Frankenstein* was shown. Next, the family is having breakfast and the silence hangs until Fernando produces his watch, which Ana gave to the *maquis*, and makes it chime. Or at the end when Teresa, shocked out of her complacency by her daughter's experience and having burnt her last letter to the adopted child in the Red Cross camp, finds her husband asleep over his desk. She removes his glasses and places his jacket over his shoulders, revealing that she has advanced from turning away and feigning sleep at the sound of his step on the stairs.

The structure of *The Spirit of the Beehive* is lyrical and, as Erice has remarked, there is no tradition of lyrical film-making in Spain, where only the American model is known. Frequently during shooting the actors and crew did not understand what was being asked of them, and there was much scepticism among the crew. In evading the baleful American influence, believing that in the 1950s the Americans nearly killed the art of cinema, Erice goes back to D. W. Griffith in his unfurled pace and sparing use of dialogue. Pre-eminently visual, scrupulously composed and superbly photographed by Luis Cuadrado, *Spirit of the Beehive* often has the impact of a silent film; its rhythm is a reflection of the family's life. Such subtle understatement met with widespread incomprehension inside Spain, where audiences and distributors look for films which reinforce and give comfort to their social and intellectual standing, avoiding what will worry or upset. This may explain the booing at San Sebastian when the prize was announced.

Erice is now thirty-three. Between leaving the film school and making *The Spirit of the Beehive*, his first full-length film, he was critic and scriptwriter, assistant to Miguel Picazo for *La Tia Tula* (1964), and maker of publicity films and commercials. He has said that he would like to make a film about the traumatised girl, Ana, thirty years on from the action of *The Spirit of the Beehive*.

La Prima Angélica, Carlos Saura's ninth film, which gained him the Jury Prize at Cannes this year, expands the peripheral attention given to the Civil War in *El Jardín de las Delicias* (1970). The film begins with the refectory of a boys' college crawling

with bodies extricating themselves in slow-motion from the wreckage caused by a chance Republican bomb. Later there is a fine evocation of July 18th, 1936. With the sound of machine-guns from the street, a cowering member of the Falange is wary of opening the door ('We're expecting a disaster'). He reasserts himself when the electricity returns and the radio reveals that the troops in possession of the town are Nationalist. Luis, the boy whose stay with his grandmother, aunt and uncle and cousin is prolonged because of the outbreak of war, suffers abuse of his Republican father in Madrid from these relatives, until one terrible moment when he imagines his father being shot. Finally Luis, with his cousin Angélica and a bicycle, attempts to cross the Nationalist lines to reach Madrid. Soldiers bring them back and Angélica's father thrashes Luis with his belt. In the background, behind the boy's cries, Imperio Argentina sings *Rocio*.

The film is an attempt to explain the significance of the Civil War to a generation, specifically the generation too young to have fought in it. Saura has claimed that his film is the first to be made about the Civil War from the point of view of the side which lost. Luis, the central character, lost the war as a child because it traumatised him, and the film demonstrates that thirty years later the wounds remain. The crippling effects of the traditional combination of church and family are seen here against the background of the national trauma of civil war. The film is notably critical of the church: its characters include a thuggish priest, a vindictive nun with stigmata and a priest expatiating on the dimensions of Eternity to a group of cowering boys, a scene which recalls a well-known passage in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. For Stephen Dedalus, Ireland was 'the old sow that eats her farrow'; and so, for Saura, is Spain. Stephen Dedalus escapes but Luis does not, cannot.

There is a horrifying inevitability about the scene in which he is unable to comfort middle-aged Angélica (Lina Canalejas) when she comes to him in desperation because of her husband's neglect. He is unable to oppose her husband Anselmo, the seeming reincarnation of Angélica's Falange father. In fact Anselmo and the father are played by the same actor, but their appearance in real life must have been different, as a photograph of Angélica's father reveals. Saura's use of the same actors either as themselves when young or taking different roles thirty years earlier emphasises—like the furniture shrouded in plastic sheets in the room where Luis stayed as a boy and where he stays again at his now elderly aunt's insistence—that despite the prosperity nothing has changed. Franco's victory merely destroyed the hopes aroused by the Second Republic.

In opposition to the conformity and sterility and bullying implicit in an acceptance of Franco's regime, implicit in the character of Anselmo, Saura places haunting moments: Angélica's daughter trying on a floppy hat in the driving mirror while a pop tune ('Change it all') erupts from the car radio; Angélica, her daughter and Luis hurling a Frisbee at each other in an assertion of spontaneity reminiscent of the early films of Godard, while Anselmo stretches



'La Prima Angélica'

out in his car for a siesta ('I've got a date with a woman,' he has said to Luis, who doesn't understand) after boasting to Luis of his financial acumen; middle-aged Angélica reciting a poem by Machado; Angélica and Luis when children inscribing their names on a stone monument while a train passes out of sight.

What is curious about *La Prima Angélica* is the complete absence of dramatic tension. The film is an assembly of montages, exquisitely photographed by Luis Cuadrado, which cohere in the mind later, rather than in the moment of seeing the film. Like *El Jardín de las Delicias*, *La Prima Angélica* is sustained by the considerable talents of José Luis López Vázquez in the central role. If Saura depends on him again he risks making the same kind of film again, for there are similarities between *La Prima Angélica*, in which a man remembers and reconstructs moments from his childhood, and *El Jardín de las Delicias*, where a man is forced to relive moments from his childhood.

Saura always risks being praised for what he says rather than for how he says it. He admits that all his films are polemical, which means that criticism of them can always be dismissed as being right wing, as of course it usually is; but this situation tends to immunise him from self-criticism as well. Fortunately, *La Prima Angélica* is heartening in that its realism suggests that Saura has moved away from the aridity of *La Madriguera* (1969) and the artificiality of *Ana y los Lobos* (1972). The sometimes hermetic symbolism was of course a way of circumventing the censor, but it threatened to smother Saura's talent. His films between *Peppermint Frappé* and *La Prima Angélica* were as much the product of the exigencies of Franco's regime as those of a director of the 1940s and 1950s, like Juan de Orduña. Both were forced to escape from reality, Saura into allegorical cerebralism and Orduña into making a succession of historical dramas glorifying Spain's Imperial past, a past seen exclusively in terms of what Franco and his supporters claimed to have been fighting for. Neither was permitted unfettered exercise of his talent.

The slackening of censorship should alleviate this, and help Saura towards the creation of an integrated work of art worthy of comparison with *The Spirit of the Beehive*. For one doubts the Spanish critics who have argued that *La Prima Angélica* is on a par with the highest level of modern European cinema. Certainly an international comparison with the work of Antonioni, Wajda, Fellini, Godard, Bertolucci and Bellocchio, and a national comparison with, for instance, most of Berlanga's films, is not to *La Prima Angélica's* advantage.

Both *La Prima Angélica* and *The Spirit of the Beehive* were produced by Elías Querejeta, who remains the only consistent producer of quality films in Spain and who employs the best crew in the country, notably the photographer Luis Cuadrado, the camera operator Teo Escamilla and the sound recordist Luis Martínez. Outside Spain, indeed sometimes inside as well, there exists 'the Querejeta myth', exemplified by his award at Venice in 1969. The citation read: 'For the courage and perseverance of his action in favour of an independent production, against all the traditional and conformist tendencies.' One might jibe at the word 'independent'. For, as Antonio Castro has pointed out (in his *El Cine Español en el Banquillo*, Valencia, 1974, a collection of interviews with twenty-nine Spanish directors), Querejeta has 'made more than twenty films without having to make an investment of his own.'

Querejeta's films have been financed by the government which, under the norms instigated in 1964 by García Escudero, then Director General of Cinema, backed the costs, in the form of credit before shooting, and an advance on a percentage of the box-office takings (the size of the percentage depending on the points awarded when the film was seen before its release) of films judged to be of 'special interest', films which might represent Spain with dignity at foreign festivals. This protection was intended as propaganda for the foreign image of Franco's regime and to direct attention away from the general mediocrity of Spanish cinema. Also, because such films would be

seen by a comparatively small number of people inside Spain, they were subject to less censorship than the normal commercial offering. Querejeta's films have satisfied the needs artificially created by García Escudero's policy; without government protection he might only have been able to make one film.

Apart from *The Spirit of the Beehive* and *La Prima Angélica*, two films stand out from recent Spanish production, not least by virtue of the fact that their characters are credible people, not symbols or puppets. *Habla, Mudita!*, written and directed by Manolo Gutiérrez, won a prize at Berlin last year and was this year's Spanish contender for an Oscar. A first film, *Habla, Mudita!* reveals the same confidence in a personal vision as *The Spirit of the Beehive*. A middle-aged publisher from Madrid (José Luis López Vázquez), on holiday in the Pyrenees, meets a dumb shepherd girl, and becomes obsessed with the idea of getting her to talk. The film evokes an extraordinary poetic atmosphere, a fairytale world where the publisher loses interest in his position in the civilised surroundings of the capital.

El Amor de Capitán Brando, directed by Jaime de Armiñán, was the Spanish entry at Berlin this year. A boy of thirteen escapes from the constricting pressures of life in a small Castilian town through his imagination of films where he plays Captain Brando, a man capable of fearless and unquenchable love. He embarks on a relationship with his teacher (Ana Belén), who is drawn into the world of Captain Brando, as is Fernando (Fernando Fernán Gómez), recently returned from exile, a man obsessed by the Civil War and unable to comprehend the reality of contemporary Spain. The film is meticulous in its observation of provincial frustrations, of people fighting to become themselves in the face of the hostile incomprehension of a small town.

The fact that *El Amor de Capitán Brando* includes a scene in which Ana Belén undresses, a sit-in (by the schoolchildren) and a ridiculous mayor suggests, like *La Prima Angélica*, that the *apertura* is working. Although the film was made before the *apertura*, and its script was repeatedly censored, it was finally passed with the censor only insisting on a few changes in the mayor's dialogue. Armiñán himself admits that the film as it stands would not have been possible a year ago.

Meanwhile Spanish production remains mostly mediocre: horror films, science fiction, comedies about the sexual repressions of the Spanish male. Or films like *El Último Viaje* and *Aborto Criminal*, the one about teenage drugs and sex, the other about abortion. Both pretend to objectivity; both are meretricious and end in heavily reinforcing the *status quo*. *El Último Viaje* is about a sixteen-year-old schoolgirl bedded by a drug pusher in Barcelona, tripping at an orgy in Cadaques and undergoing an abortion in Amsterdam. On her return she dies from an overdose of LSD. It has been her last trip. The Spain of Philip II has claimed her.

The most popular indigenous productions in terms of box-office receipts remain the comedies, four or five each year, featuring Alfredo Landa. *Un Curita Cañon* (literally 'A Fabulous Little Priest') is typical.

Landa plays a priest who encounters problems in his new parish. Some he solves, with the help of the leader of a female group appearing at the local discothèque, but eventually the town's hostility becomes too strong and he decides to resign. His bishop takes him to the balcony of his palace; below in the square is a cheering horde of parishioners. The film ends on this Triumphalist note. It could be Franco at Burgos on October 1st, 1936.

Another indication of current attitudes is *Cinco Almohadas para una noche* ('Five Pillows for a Night'). The plot concerns a girl about to get married, who sees a photograph of her mother in the house of her future father-in-law. Could he be the father she has never known? To find out, she brings together the five men closest to her mother, a famous singer during the Second Republic. It transpires that her mother slept with all five men (one of them a member of something very like the C.N.T., the Anarchist Trade Union) in a single night in 1936, shortly before the outbreak of war. By contrast her daughter, in the present, is terrified of losing her fiancé. The respect due to consecrated moral values is reserved for the present, with the censor condoning promiscuity if it is confined to an epoch when anything and everything was possible, if one is to believe the historians of the regime.

There are further recent instances of the ploys of the censor. *Mogambo* was revived this year. The dubbing continues to insist that Ava Gardner is Clark Gable's sister and not his mistress. Peckinpah's *The Getaway* had titles appended to the final shot, telling the audience that shortly after the action of the film the couple were caught by the police in Mexico and received hefty jail sentences. The Marx Brothers' *A Day at the Races*, made in 1940, circulates in a version dubbed with gags about Fidel Castro and Brigitte Bardot.

It has been said with justice that the history of the Spanish cinema is as much the history of the films never allowed to be made as of those that were. Berlanga, for instance, has a cupboard stacked with rejected scripts. In the 1940s, there were cases of films enjoying short runs before they were withdrawn and all prints destroyed (*Rojo y Negro*, 1941). Or of a film being banned the day before its gala premiere and all copies being destroyed (*El Crucero Baleares*, 1941). The country then was glutted with German and Italian films. The film criticism of the period has to be read to be believed for

The church holding the baby: Alfredo Landa in 'Un Curita Cañon'



its Triumphalist hyperbole and anti-Communism with a tincture of anti-Semitism. As the war was won by the side which had promised a New Order, the neo-realist trends in the Spanish cinema were quashed, trends visible in Santugini's *Una Mujer en Peligro* (1935) and Puche's *Barrios Bajos* (1937). It was not until *Surcos* (1951) by Nieves Conde and *Esa Pareja Feliz* (1951) by Bardem and Berlanga that any reply was made to the cloying religiosity of Sáenz de Heredia's *La Mies Es Mucha* (1948) and the kitsch flamenco strain in Orduña's *La Lola se va a los puertos* (1947).

The fact remains that Pío Cabanillas, the present Minister of Information and Tourism, has got to make the *apertura* work. He has to get it accepted by the right wing, by those responsible for the throwing of red paint and the scuffles in the projection box and the smashed windows and the bomb in connection with *La Prima Angélica*. Trouble arose because of the scene where Angélica's father, wounded on the Aragon front, has (following the medical practice then normal) his arm aloft in plaster, in the position of the Fascist salute. The Secretary of the Falange received forty thousand letters demanding the banning of the film, which was seen by six ministers before being authorised without cuts. Obviously it is being pushed as a test case. If the *apertura* thrives it is to be hoped that Berlanga will film again in Spain. And Buñuel too, who has had trouble with the Spanish censor since 1933, when the government of Lerroux banned *Land Without Bread*. Although all Buñuel's films since he left Spain have been about Spain, he has not yet dealt with the Civil War.

After thirty-five years of cultural politics, distributor, exhibitor and audience share the same mentality, described by a Spanish director recently as that of a child of fourteen. What may be the least sophisticated audiences of any Western European capital watch what must be the worst prints in Western Europe. What is needed are films which help the Spanish to face up to reality. Thirty-five years of cultural deprivations and depredations have produced an indifference which is hailed officially, on occasions like the assassination of Carrero Blanco, as serenity. What is needed, for example, are honest films about the Civil War by directors who experienced the war as adults. Sáenz de Heredia, for instance, has a project for a film about his cousin, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the founder of the Falange.

The Spanish cinema can do nothing more worthwhile than help the Spanish people to face the past honestly, to conquer their fear of shibboleths, to slough off what Luis Carandell has aptly termed *la baja calidad humana*, literally 'the low quality of human life,' endemic since 1939, evident in thousands of books which represent a trampling on the truth appalling in its implications and which it will take decades to eradicate. In this sense the most hopeful sign in the last year was the shattered appearance of middle-aged and elderly people leaving the cinema in Madrid showing *The Spirit of the Beehive*. They had been forced to remember something they had been schooled to forget, something they had pretended had never existed.

Write what the film needs

AN INTERVIEW WITH ELISABETH LUTYENS

Jeffery Kemp



Elisabeth Lutyens, now in her sixty-ninth year, embarked upon a career in music in order to be independent of family influences; a decision which faced her with innumerable obstacles. Despite frustrating years seeking recognition, she now stands out amongst the most distinguished serious composers of our time. She was regarded as the pioneer of twelve-tone technique in this country and numbered amongst her friends Igor Stravinsky and Luigi Dallapiccola—both of whom she came to know through her late husband, Edward Clark, the music director. Among her many works are operas, orchestral works, songs and chamber music as well as commissions for radio and film scores. In 1969 she was awarded the C.B.E. and in 1972 published her autobiography, *A Goldfish Bowl*. Miss Lutyens effervesces with nervous energy and works with ceaseless activity and a perfectionist's insistence on accuracy of detail. This interview highlights some of the frustrations of her career as a composer of music for films.

Miss Lutyens, you are the daughter of Sir Edwin Lutyens, the architect, and of Lady Emily Lutyens. From whom do you inherit your musical talent?

ELISABETH LUTYENS: I don't know—do you think talents are always inherited? I suppose they're in the genes. I had an aunt* who, I gather, was a very good pianist. But I never heard her play because, as a militant suffragette, she had been imprisoned and went on hunger strike, and the forcible feeding she endured produced a stroke which left her partially paralysed for the rest of her life. I wanted to choose an occupation—a profession—which would free me from family interference. If I had chosen a visual art I might have had my father leaning over my shoulder, and if I'd chosen literature, my mother, who was a granddaughter of Bulwer-Lytton, the novelist.

What are the chief problems of being a woman composer?

Man's prejudice!

What factors have most influenced your style of writing?

The world and the times I've lived through. I am not easily influenceable by other composers. They have written *their* music; I want to write *mine*. Nevertheless—and forgetting for the moment the great classics on which I cut my musical teeth—

the music of Debussy, the first 'modern' music I heard, made an enormous impact on me. I was sixteen. You must remember that in those days 'Modern Art' was a great cause, a battle against the philistines and—especially—the academics. I decided, with a good deal of family opposition at that early age, to go and study in Paris. And Paris in the 1920s seemed the most exciting place in the world. There I saw my first 'modern' pictures: Picasso, Braque, Juan Gris; heard of James Joyce and his work and went to first performances of Igor Stravinsky. It seemed everything was happening there... and I was young... I studied piano and solfège at the Ecole Normale and took private composition lessons with Georges Caussade, a wonderful teacher.

When did you begin writing for films?

My first film score was written in 1944 for the Crown Film Unit, for which I later did many films. It was called *Jungle Mariners*, and was produced by Basil Wright, who was to become a firm friend. I remember that I was paralysed with fright.

Is there anything about your own musical style that lends itself to film treatment? What would you say directors are seeking when they select you to write for their films?

I don't know that directors had much say in the matter; they would more likely rely on their musical directors to advise

them as to the most suitable composer. The musical directors, therefore, had a lot of power (Muir Matheson, for example, was musical director to numerous film companies). If one wanted film work it was obviously necessary to be 'in' with the musical director to win his approval, for without this one's chances were slim. Of course, as one's work became known, a director or producer might approach one direct with an offer of a film score. The musical directors did not like this at all, since it obviously threatened their position in a job which was often redundant.

But is there anything particular about the sound of the music you write that perhaps lends itself to dramatic art?

I don't think that is the way round. With some notable exceptions, films are not made to music already written. It is the composer who must write for the film, which is not—viz. many documentaries—necessarily of a 'dramatic' sort. I remember Ralph Elton, Arthur Elton's brother, once saying to me over a drink, 'Lizzy, I think your music's bloody awful but it always makes me want to put a film to it.' A doubtful compliment! There is, or *should* be, a great difference between music written for the concert hall and for a film. One expects the first to be listened to for its own sake. Film music is and must be subsidiary to the visual and the dialogue or commentary. An imaginary example: a boy and girl chatting in a railway carriage, perhaps a casual *rencontre*, calling for quiet, simple music under speech. She might ask, 'Where were you in the war?' His memory evoked, the film might cut to fighting in North Africa; a tank battle, one hell of a din with death and horror that it had been decided earlier was to be interpreted with music rather than with soundtrack. A week or so after writing the score comes the music-recording session and total incomprehension on hearing the probably forgotten music (and on a lot of films I've done, the sooner you forget the picture, the better!). There appears to be no form, no shape and no *raison d'être*. Then—'Roll the picture.' The studio darkens, the visual appears, the music 'fits' and logic is restored.

*Lady Constance Lytton.



Elisabeth Lutyens wrote the music for the flower ('Secrets of Life') and the horror picture ('Dr. Terror's House of Horrors')

Does a composer lose his or her own style in creating music for the screen?

The only honest thing is to write what the film needs—what the visual requires. The producer will expect the composer to be able to write jazz, Gregorian chant, Viennese Waltz—anything required by the film, and if you don't know, find out! By the time the composer comes in, the film has usually reached fine cut stage. Anyhow, one cannot start work on a film score before this, for we write precisely to within a third of a second. Now, if you are providing music for road-laying in Malaya, or a horror film with girls being constantly garrotted (both of which I have done), it would be pointless, silly and dishonest to write 'abstract' music that depends on concentrated listening only—listening for the beauty or pleasure it gives to the mind and senses via the ear. You have not time to learn to love film music. One must write on the presumption of one hearing; instant effect. It's a form of musical journalism which can be excellent of its sort, like an enormously good and interesting article in a paper. In contrast, lyric poetry is written with a trust in a long future. . .

Like painting and sculpture and the other visual arts?

You mention sculpture and painting, but nowadays you paint alone, you sculpt alone. I was looking last night at a film on Leonardo da Vinci. In that period, there were artists' studios where there would be several apprentices working on one painting. And nowadays, although the composer sits at a desk and writes the film music alone, he did start, and he's going to finish, in co-operation, isn't he? Now of course the trouble with film music is that the editor hears it *ad nauseam* when he comes to the dubbing and the editing, and also by the time the composer comes into the film it's the maximum exhaustion period for every-

body—they are all longing to get it finished. They've probably got a release date, so the composer is the one whose time is cut shorter. When the cue sheets are sent they can relax and then, often, come up with second thoughts. I had recorded one documentary which was supposed to be in 'bleak midwinter', but at the recording session *spring* flowers were blooming away. They said, 'Oh yes, but it's the same length' . . . but, of course, bleak music didn't fit. I said 'cuckoos' to that!

What made you take up writing music for films? Was it money?

I had to earn my living and I also had dependants. First I copied music at 10d a page—8d for the BBC. This involved some fourteen hours a day doing sixteen pages an hour. I gradually obtained orchestration and arrangement work; better paid and more interesting. And finally film work. I was, no doubt, induced into work for the films in the first instance by the need for money, but you can't think of money and the job at the same time. You have an agent—let *him* bargain to get as much money as he can. On one occasion, over twenty years ago, I was writing a score for the Crown Film Unit. In those days, there was an unratified agreement with the Musicians' Union of £10 a minute. (Is this why there was too much music in films?) There was a point in this film where I thought not only that music was unnecessary but that it would spoil the sequence. An argument ensued—two for music, two against—and the producer finally came down on my side, for no music. In the train going home, although pleased that I had gained my artistic point, I suddenly realised that I had thereby lost myself £50.

How much freedom do you have in selecting the films you score?

Oh, no freedom. I'm offered a film by my agent or a musical director, or out of the blue. One Sunday evening, of all things, I was offered two documentaries and a feature film—by telephone. No one appears to write.

How long are you usually given to write a score?

I ask for three weeks after receiving cue sheets with all the timings, because I don't think they'd give me any more. Anyhow, you couldn't stand to live with most of the films I've done for more than three weeks! Once, by mistaking the date, I found I had promised to write a fifty-minute score in five days. The copyist arrived every two

'There's going to be an organ . . .' Oliver Reed as a mad murderer about to go on the rampage in 'Paranoiac'



hours for a slab of music and, of course, sleep and food were forgotten. But I did it, and it turned out well. A composer unable to write quickly is ill-advised to attempt film work. But when finished, you have probably earned enough to keep doing your own music (which doesn't pay) for perhaps three months.

What are the priorities in writing for films?

The first thing to do, that same evening if possible, is to book a copyist, because good copyists are rare, and an orchestra. You have to decide on your band before writing your music. You can't write the music in short score and *then* say what instruments you want, because it would be too late to book them. You've got to remember that there's a scene in the village church where there's going to be an organ. Or perhaps there's a brass band going through a village, so you have to allow for a brass band. You may not want a trumpet or cornet in any other sequence, but you've got to have it for that one. Well, that gives you a few of your instruments. Now, as you've got those instruments, you must try to use them elsewhere as otherwise it's awfully extravagant. One of the most tiresome things about film music—a thing that I really do dislike—is someone coming into a room and turning on the wireless. You've got to write music until there's either a cut or it's turned off. I remember one horror film. There was a belly dancer at some big party. Nobody's interested in the party—they're watching Christopher Lee going round the back—but every now and again you see this navel going round. The film had been shot to a Beatles record (and it costs a fortune to use commercial records in films) so I had to write four and a half minutes—which seems a lifetime—at exactly the same speed. They give you either the record itself or what they call the 'click track' so that you can match it for the dance.

You have done a number of horror films: *Never Take Sweets from a Stranger*, *Paranoiac*, *Dr. Terror's House of Horrors*, *The Skull*, and so on. Do you prefer writing for horror films?

They're fun to do. What is very difficult is having to write in an 18th century style, when required, since this involves eight bar phrases and, as one does not make a cut at a beginning or ending of such bars, it means writing more than wanted in order to 'cut in'. The same should apply to some jazz scores, though it seldom does. I was, alas, only too often asked to write 'Tchaikovsky'. I felt that if this was wanted, as he is out of copyright, why not use his music? Though why use a 19th century homosexual Russian composer for an English 20th century medium—I don't know.

Do you think that horror in films is harmful to children?

Children are far more horror-loving, and horror-inventing, than any grown-ups. I was rather horrified when my four-year-old granddaughter's favourite game was to lie down pretending to be dead and we had to tickle her and be the maggots. I thought it was a horrible game, but she had invented it—not me! And do you realise the first song you sing to a child is 'Rock-a-bye baby, the cradle will fall, down will come baby, bough, cradle and all'?

How do you set about creating a score? Do you have a working method?

I want to see the film first of all without anybody telling me anything, as if I'd just gone to the pictures and felt 'what's missing?' Then you see it reel by reel, which sometimes takes a day or more for a ten or twelve reel film. You've then got to discuss and decide where music is coming in and, even more difficult, where it goes out, and its purpose and function in the film. Generally, if you notice, it comes out on a sound effect or cut. And then there's the problem of getting what I call the basic sound which fits *that* particular picture. This is the most difficult of the lot; those first few days or hours when you haven't got the 'what is the picture, the whole thing, about?', so that every time you hear the score it evokes *that* picture—a real wedding, a real marriage. Once you have got the basic style it becomes just hard work, and that you can command.

Do you begin by writing a main theme on which you are going to construct the rest of your score?

That entirely depends on the film. There was a very tiresome period in films; I think it was just after *High Noon*, with a ballad over the title. As I don't think film producers appear to get ideas more than once in ten years, they wanted to start *every* film with a ballad over the titles.

I wondered whether you use themes rather like Wagner's leitmotifs, so that you can express the mood of a character through his theme as the plot develops.

Well, sometimes producers do ask you to do that. I don't know if you remember a film of many years ago, Hitchcock's *Rope*, from the play about those two young murderers Leopold and Loeb who killed a boy for kicks. That really horrible story was accompanied throughout with a little childlike tune—based on 'Mouvement Perpetuel' by Poulenc—and this simple tune, set against the horror of murdering in cold blood, added an extra chill. One could have followed the killing dramatically and 'sync'd' it. There was a time when one was always asked to write 19th century romantic music to films. Yet the film is one of the only 20th century art mediums. I do remember, for instance, a 'documentary' set in Nigeria. It opened up with a shot of black men hauling wood. It could have been as exciting a score as, for instance, 'The Rite of Spring' (I'm not talking about imitating Stravinsky); instead of which, to my surprise, the producer and musical director turned and said, 'Now what we need here is the "Warsaw Concerto"'. I thought, 'I can't work with these people, it's really too boring and illiterate.' And then I went and bought the 'Warsaw Concerto' (which is a perfectly honourable sort of 'mock Rachmaninov' that Richard Addinsell wrote for *Dangerous Moonlight* in 1941), and before you know where you are, you're trapped by the challenge. I still think it was an idiotic idea; but I could have refused the job rather than get involved in the challenge. However, there's a story that Darius Milhaud told me of dealing with unmusical producers. He'd done a score in Hollywood and the American producer said, 'Oh, I think Mr. Milhaud, this needs more "chune".' Milhaud said, 'Well I could put it up an octave,' and the producer answered, 'Oh no, no,



Documentary and horror. Rotha and Wright's 'World Without End'; Lelia Goldoni in 'Theatre of Death'

that's too much—half an octave will do.'

Have you ever declined a film commission?

No, I think quite honestly that I have never turned down a job (if you've got dependants you don't). I remember once someone saying to me about a certain composer, 'Poor chap, he'd had to wait eighteen months before getting his first feature film after documentaries.' I said, 'I've waited twelve years to get a feature film,' and got the most peculiar answer. 'Oh, but you're a woman and all directors say women haven't the balance to feel passion...'

Is there perhaps more room to develop musical ideas in a documentary, because of the absence of dialogue?

In as much as the music often has a greater chance of being noticed, as so often documentaries are not so absorbing. But of course, if there is no dialogue there can be lots of commentary. I remember one film with beautiful visuals, set I think in Malaya. (It was eventually called *The Green Islands*, but often, when I arrive on the scene, the films are still being called *Production So-and-So*, titles being added later.) Now documentary films depend on a sponsor with a commodity to promote, although if theatrical distribution is required the product must not be mentioned by name. This particular sponsor had a lot to say about his product, process or what not (was it, I wonder, that endlessly boring bauxite?). Anyhow, the commentary hardly let up for a second and was extremely tedious, so little of the music could be heard. One of the great faults of bad documentaries is dotting i's and crossing t's. You see a tobacco plant in the picture (word written up); the commentary talks of tobacco and the composer is supposed to write 'tobacco' music. It underrates the audience, which is insulting. But no doubt,

I'm talking of the bad old days.

You've also written for radio dramas. Does this require a different technique?

Quite different. In films eye takes precedence over ear; in radio one has first and foremost to realise that one is writing for a blind audience and the music can help give it eyes. One can place characters in costume; set the scene in one part of the world or another. There is also a far greater laxity in timings. For films, as I've said, we must work to an exact third of a second. For radio, the producer asks for 'about so many seconds', and his judgment of what he wants is often wide of the mark. I remember when Louis MacNeice once asked for forty-seven seconds when I was sure that what he really wanted was twelve seconds—which I gave him and which was what he had meant. Music is often recorded before the play or feature it is required for, and the producer reads—to a stop-watch—the speed he will be producing it at. However, as actors vary so much it is wiser to write 'elastic' music.

Would you say that the film soundtrack provides composers with the opportunity to test unusual orchestral combinations that would be rather more difficult to try out in the concert hall?

The soundtrack is quite separate from the music track, and a soundtrack layer is a specialist in his field—although the composer should work in collaboration with him so that music and soundtrack are not in conflict but complementary. If one is interested in exploring a certain sound there is added opportunity; writing for flute below the bassoon, for instance. But of course nothing must be done at the expense of the film. I remember one sponsor for a documentary asking if I would mind him making the request that I 'be more Bach than Bartók'—meaning, I suppose, less 'modern'. I said, 'Of course, I don't mind,' but I'm afraid it was a question of in one ear and out the other, because faced with a new film I can *only* write what I think in all honesty is right for *that* film. Afterwards he thanked me for heeding him. So we were all pleased.

There are conflicting views about how far the audience should be aware of the music in a film. Some composers feel it should work at a subconscious level, others that the music should be consciously received by the audience. What are your feelings about this?

Ideally, you shouldn't know the music is there except when everybody—meaning the director, the producer, the composer—all mean it to be there and allow for it; it takes over, so to speak, and says things on purpose that the visual cannot. But this must be a co-operative decision. The music can give a story away—which it mustn't do. You could tell from the music whether the hero was a 'goody' or a 'baddy'. You can also write good scores for bad films.

If we see just a close-up of a character's face on the screen, it could be at moments like this that music could tell the audience what was going on in his mind.

It can do those sort of things, and you could use silence for a close-up and let the face do it. You can do all sorts of technical things. For instance, a battle roaring (not on

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THE

'We have been watching *The Family* on BBC-1. I can hardly believe it is an average family. Who wants to listen to half an hour of drivel? I should think the cameraman was bored to tears.'

Had Enough, in the *Birmingham Evening Mail*



'The BBC series *The Family* is an insult to the average British working class family. The vast majority of working class parents would never condone their daughter living under their roof with a man unless married to him. . . It would be better to wrap up this series before any further damage is done to the British image abroad.'

Edith A. Higgs, Penrith, in the *Daily Mail*

'... I cannot see the necessity of prying into the private lives of any family, but if it is to be done then why not choose a family with high ideals, intellectual pursuits, aesthetic appreciation, and moral stamina?'

H. R. Pitchford, Birmingham, in the *Reading Evening Post*

'I can only say that if the Wilkins are an average family, Heaven help the community. . . I am surprised the BBC showed such trash. Surely there are plenty of normal families in Reading who could have depicted a typical decent family.'

Disgusted, in *Reading Evening Post*

FAMILY

On March 28th this year, the *Radio Times* announced the start of a new BBC television series, *The Family*. 'For the next three months,' we were told, 'the Wilkins family will have a four-man television crew to stay with them. Their every action will be filmed for a series of documentary programmes. . . ' The heading read—'The family that stars together sticks together.' The motto of a radio evangelist in California used to promise 'The family that prays together stays together.' Now the way to do it was to get your own TV show.

But the reference in the *Radio Times* was different. American viewers will recognise it as being to Craig Gilbert's Public Broadcast series *An American Family*, a twelve-part one-hour show hacked out of more than half a million feet of 16mm colour film. In that one, the *Radio Times* told us, the family was 'watched for seven months by the camera. That family broke up under the strain.' Pat Loud did in fact give Bill Loud his marching orders while the camera rolled. What the *Radio Times* didn't say (nor did Craig Gilbert's film) was that this had happened three times before. This time it stuck, but was it the strain of the cameras which made the difference? There's some reasonable room for doubt.

Anyway, Terry Wilkins, at 39 a bus driver for the local corporation, was reported as being unperturbed. 'They'll only be here from about seven in the morning to 11 at night. We'll still be able to keep the very intimate part of our lives quite private. We have nothing to hide, really.'

It's not surprising that the series caused an uproar—even among people who didn't watch it. Common sense attitudes towards such things are hopelessly confused and self-contradictory. When the Wilkins appeared on BBC-1 at peak viewing time they had a steady audience of 7 to 10 million. But both local MPs complained. One called for the cancellation of the show, while the other said that in his view it was 'a mistake and a disservice to television.'

The so-called American counterpart, *An American Family*, has not been screened in Britain and most people (including most

critics) writing about the British programme had not seen it. This has not prevented them from making comparisons, and coming to conclusions. The over-simplified *Radio Times* reference is probably to blame.

Both series are gold mines for the cultural historian or the urban sociologist, although I suspect that the 'sub-text' (the production company's relationship to the subject) is much more complex in the American case. A critic ignorant of those relationships could make serious errors of analysis.

The American producer, like Paul Watson (producer of *The Family*), advertised for

families willing to be filmed. He (and they) thought at first that the shooting might last a few weeks, but gradually it expanded to seven months. All the filming was completed before the screenings started. It is clear that Pat and Bill Loud were quite unprepared for the vituperation of the public response.

There are many reasons why this might be. There may be a real difference between our memory of an event and a film record of it. Perhaps memory fictionalises what happened, suppressing the bad bits of a 'scene', remembering only the points scored. By selecting bits of the shooting for the scene in the movie, the editor fictionalises according to a different narrative code. It's also possible that those responsible for the series accidentally or intentionally misled the family. Pat Loud was concerned with the way the series was 'sold'. The sales campaign, she alleged, sensationalised the content and gave people a way of looking for trouble and scandal which biased their perception.

It was perhaps inevitable that it would be billed as the break-up of a marriage, the crash of the American dream. A Southern California multi-car, multi-bedroom, multi-bathroom, swimming pool family falls apart. The station distributing the series (WNET in New York) knew it had all happened, so why not say so? From the publicity viewpoint the pressure was probably irresistible, but I am reminded of George Stoney's point, made some years earlier, about the responsibilities of the film-maker to his subjects. He was speaking (around 1969) about an early production of the *Challenge for Change* unit which he ran



'The Family': the Wilkins family at the wedding of daughter Marian. Opposite page: Mrs. Wilkins

at the time: Tanya Ballantyne's haunting portrait of a Catholic family in Montreal, *The Things I Cannot Change*. The director and crew were extremely sympathetic to their subject—a poor family waiting for their tenth child with only a few dollars left. But precisely by getting close to them, the film-makers exposed them to danger; not like the radioactivity of an X-ray tube, but through the simple fact that neighbours and friends would see them with all the wraps pulled off. When you don't know them, you can look at them and worry about them in the most general way; possibly in a way which approaches our reaction to fictional characters, but certainly quite differently from the way neighbours will see them.

Stoney presented us with the quite shocking idea that a professional film-maker's approach might have to be modified by the reaction of a handful of people. The fate of the people in the film was seen to be more important than the film-maker's ego. Stoney was not suggesting that the film must necessarily be changed (although it might come to that) but rather that the family's situation had to be taken into consideration when it was shown. Perhaps this called for a local showing with invited friends before the public screening.

This kind of morality was not scheduled or budgeted in Craig Gilbert's series, and it has not bothered generations of documentary or newsreel photographers all over the world. But now something is changing. There is a heightened sense of the imbalance created by the existence of a small group of media professionals who constitute a new élite, controlling the image a culture has of itself. And series like *An American Family* are beginning to deal with a level of intimate behaviour that till now has been the province of fiction.

At any rate, the Wilkins appear to be weathering their storm. Much of the credit must go to the producers. Watson has been criticised for saying that a major reason for choosing the Wilkins was that he

calculated they could stand the strain. Something about the way this was stated at the beginning of the first show struck many of us as offensive. It was almost as if the process of filming and televising was itself inflexible and unresponsive to individual needs, and people had to adapt themselves to television rather than the other way around. But this was an unfair impression.

From all accounts the film crew was at great pains not to put the crude requirements of filming first. When Alan Raymond and Joan Churchill were shooting *An American Family*, for purely technical reasons the normal house lights were replaced by photo-floods. When Richard Leiterman shot *A Married Couple* for Allan King in 1969 he had to light the house, using a supplementary generator which was switched on every morning when the crew arrived, and switched off when they left. In the British series, Philip Bonham-Carter could work with much faster film and lower light levels and still get enough detail, leaving the lighting pattern of the house pretty much alone. But fiction has formed our way of looking at things, and much of the criticism claims that the programmes were badly lit and poorly photographed. Even the MPs mentioned that, as if to clinch their argument. Thus, on these points, the producers are caught in a double bind. They were criticised from the one side because they did not and could not match the gloss and polish of fictionalised drama, and yet were given no credit from the other side for leaving the family room to live their lives.

The crucial difference between the British and the American series lies, however, in the decision to start telecasting *The Family* while shooting was still going on. Thus by the end of week one the editors had started their work. While shooting continued, in week two, the editors cut the first material. By week three they handed a cut version over for mixing and laboratory work and by week four it was

on the air. This rhythm continued throughout most of the twelve-week period. By the time they were in their fourth week of filming, the Wilkins had seen the first show and, more importantly, had read what people had to say about it.

In the first programme, Watson made a promising beginning. The terms of reference for the series were established quite clearly and on film. They were going to be there all the time, and because the crew needed no special light and had quiet cameras it would not always be easy to tell when they were shooting and when they were just looking. The family was being paid and admitted it, but since it 'wasn't very much' it did not provide an adequate reason for submitting themselves to the scrutiny of millions. They did it because they wanted to, with their eyes open, because people like them rarely had a chance to be on the box and working-class life was misrepresented by most kitchen-sink dramas, including presumably the soap operas *Coronation Street* and *Crossroads*. Mrs. Wilkins went so far as to say that their opinions were those of 60 per cent of the people, and although they were in for a lot of leg-pulling it was worth it.

Paul Watson and others appeared on camera—Franc Roddam, the director, asked questions when the conversation was flagging or whenever it wasn't clear what was happening. Sometimes this read, during the series, as 'interviewing' but at other times it came over as a conversation between two people—one on camera, and the other hidden but known to be there.

People tuning in halfway through the series were apparently often confused about whom they were watching or what was supposed to be so fascinating. But this is also true when you walk into a room full of strangers. What was unusual was that these strangers were on the box and being treated as if they were important, when they shared none of the apparent virtues of the great and the near great who are the people

usually shown in television interviews, and none of the organised precision and easy comprehensibility of the characters in a fictionalised series. But for the regular viewer (and there were clearly plenty of them) things were not hard to follow, and the producer was quite straightforward about using whatever linking device was necessary if something became potentially confusing. Roger Graef is of course correct to say (*New Society*, June 27th) that audiences have to be trained to accept new ground rules for film of this sort. The normal sequence of exposition, conflict and catharsis is replaced by something much more indefinite, much less well shaped. It is thus crucial to believe what you are seeing.

Apparently Paul Watson had hoped to do more than a 'real soap opera'. He had hoped that the events of the time (a recent miners' strike, a three-day week, and a closely fought election) could be examined in the context of this family, living its life. According to the *Radio Times*, he planned to use 'other programmes, news and current affairs to spark off the Wilkins' comments about what is going on in the world around them.' It didn't happen. Perhaps it was always a non-starter, perhaps from this aspect the family was wrongly cast. The Wilkins' minds were elsewhere—they always had enough to do sorting out their own immediate problems. And this is what made them interesting.

Margaret Wilkins, a tough, likeable, matriarchal figure, worried about her children in a way which allowed her to 'represent' the working-class mother, even if the particular problems her children gave her led many viewers to complain about Paul Watson's choice. Marian, 19, the elder daughter, working as a hair stylist, has been living off and on with Tom, 25, an ex-steel worker from Sheffield. Tom, reluctant to marry and now living with Marian in her parents' house, is a colourful kind of ne'er-do-well who is less fond of work than you are supposed to be in a puritanical society.

Another room is occupied by Gary, 18, the elder of the two sons, and Karen, also 18. They married at 16 because she was pregnant with their son Scott. Gary is a bus conductor and takes after his father, quieter but no less resolute than the women. Karen spends her day as do most young mothers—being taught the role by her mother-in-law, and gradually, as the series develops, getting prepared for living apart from the family, setting up home in a council flat, the great prize which had so far eluded them. No love seems to be lost between her and Heather, 15, Marian's sister. Heather's resentment, like all the other feelings of the family, comes through forcibly and candidly. Her boy friend Melvin is black, but she concedes that she thinks Pakistanis smell. A possible cause of Heather's resentment is that Karen and Gary occupy a room she might have. Now she shares a room with the youngest child in the Wilkins family, Christopher, 9. He is not the child of Terry, but of another man with whom Margaret had an affair during a temporary breakdown in her marriage. Margaret revealed this in the first show, apparently because she thought someone else would mention it if she didn't and because it gave her a chance to pay tribute to her husband, who had accepted the child as his own.

It already sounds like a cast of characters for a fictional soap opera. And serial soaps have large audiences because they are in some sense 'life-like'. The categories overlap, but not completely. The producers of *Coronation Street* 'assemble' a cast of characters, rich and varied enough to provoke endless variations of their relationships. The producer of *The Family* must find people who have the same potential for interesting an audience. The selection of people to illustrate a subject is crucial to the documentary film-maker. When the fiction writer (for *Coronation Street*) invents incidents he uses a certain style of dramatisation to retain credibility; the director casts to this style and the actors act 'realistically'. As the show gains in acceptability, its stereotypes take over and have as much value in establishing credibility as any reference back to real experience. If this becomes the conventional television standard for representing reality, documentary material may in turn appear lack-lustre, boring or amateurish when put on the box. Two results are possible when *The Family* is compared with *Coronation Street*. The first is that to habitués of the serial, *The Family* will appear dull. The second is that if *Coronation Street* is taken as real, audiences will reject the reality of *The Family*—denying its content and thus forcing into the forefront the other obvious reason for choosing the Wilkins—their 'typicality'.

It was in introducing Margaret Wilkins to her readers that the *Radio Times* writer (Jenny Rees) made the mistake which sent half of England off on the wrong scent. 'If there is such a thing, she's a typical housewife, and her family is a typical family.' Something (could it be the entire cultural burden of television?) led her to write that. Television usually doesn't give space to people like the Wilkins. If people appear on television, they consume a precious commodity—air time. If they are not already 'somebody' then they must surely be a nobody who is about to become a somebody. There are, as Peter Lennon intelligently pointed out (*Sunday Times*, April 7th), access shows for 'ordinary people' (nobodies) to come on and give us their views about this and that. But they are often so hampered by the apparatus of television and its routines that very little gets through. 'But with the Wilkins we have people who... are declaring to the world... week by week, that their life, which contains all kinds of curiosities, is absolutely "normal"...'

But are they typical? He thinks not. 'They are not a typical family only because there is no such thing.' But the uproar was created by people who believe in typicality, since their morality demands that there be acceptable 'norms'. Roger Graef suggests that 'normalcy' can be defined as 'sharing the same conventional values and behaviour.' He also points out, helpfully, that normalcy is not typical. 'But,' he continues, 'people want to see on television what they aspire to, not what they are.' His own choice of a family, the Browns, in the series *Space Between Words*, had raised many of the same issues and false trails.

Most television disappears without a trace. Although *Coronation Street* is always in the top twenty shows, hardly anyone

ever writes about it any more. If you live in Greenland, you stop mentioning the ice in your letters. Usually the launching of a new series gets a mention or even a review, but after that the critic rarely mentions the show again. But this case was different. I have been able to borrow the clipping file of Dave King, one of the series' editors, with stories, letters, reviews and features from all over Britain. The national press gave it yards of space, and kept up the flow of information throughout the run—not only in the popular press but also in the posh papers like the *Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Times* and *Financial Times*. The *Sundays* (both leagues) kept going at it, and Mrs. Wilkins got a weekly column in the *Evening News*. The wedding between Tom and Marian was an obligatory news item. The press in Reading, where the Wilkins live, never let go. One of the unsuccessful local Labour candidates in last February's election called for a halt on all the letters of complaint in the press when so many other 'real problems' were crying for attention.

Much of the comment was hysterical, both in the letters and the journalism. Many writers, including some of the critics, challenged the right of television producers to pry into private affairs and broadcast the results. But there was a real cultural argument at the heart of it. The *Sunday Telegraph's* Philip Purser was one of its spokesmen. He was arguing something about our notion of drama when he tried to draw a distinction between the way fiction formalises its views of the human predicament and the way *The Family* presents us directly with fragments of life caught in the raw. There are after all two main differences. In the first we know that the drama, if any good, is based on observation of human behaviour which is first abstracted and then re-enacted by others. We keep our distance from it; even if we recognise our friends in it, that's our business, it is not public information. And for the second point we like that distance—it's an essential part of our social culture. Many, perhaps most, of our public relationships are formalised—whether in business, religion or politics. Such public affairs are the proper subjects of documentaries, not private ones. Where documentary stops, out of embarrassment, or because of lack of privileged access, there fiction takes over. Philip Purser's point was not really debated by Paul Watson, who was obviously unhappy with Purser's reviews and tried to leave the impression that his argument came down to little more than moralising.

Milton Shulman put a similar concern in a different way. Acknowledging the problem for the Wilkins in being 'gawped at' by the public, he is even more worried about the audience. 'When we start using the agonies and bewilderment of real people for entertainment fodder, we are not only degrading a family like the Wilkins but cheapening ourselves and the human spirit.' As the programme survived its early critics this became a common theme, even among those who were still arguing that it was superficial (and therefore not worth bothering about), or that the Wilkins were quite capable of looking after themselves. Clive James, writing in the *Observer*, probably spoke for many when he confessed to concern about his own latent voyeurism.

Should the cameraman walk out at the moment when modesty or politeness dictates? What does it say about him if he stays—just because he is rolling film? What does it say about us if we watch what he shot? What does it say about the subjects if they don't throw the camera out?

When Roger Graef's *Space Between Words* came on the air he was criticised for showing a family under stress—an invasion of privacy. The secondary complaint was against the family itself for letting itself be filmed. A society keeps itself together with all kinds of glue. It is then being suggested that observational cinema melts societal glue, or the gauzes which are used to distinguish between public and private behaviour. Privacy is presumably crucial to the notion of civilisation. But as Jean Rouch once put it to a conference, you never film secret ceremonies. By definition. And you never film private behaviour. (Jana Bokova Whitten, shooting in Paris and London for the National Film School, found people in the Paris streets much more accessible to the candid camera than those in London, who often threatened her physically.) There is nothing necessarily subversive about observational cinema. But in the present case it has clearly made people consider where they personally would draw a line between observing and snooping.

There is probably a false dichotomy in critical writing about 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' events. (A book that avoids such over-simplification is Stephen Mamber's very useful *Cinéma Vérité in America*, M.I.T. 1974.) Hitchcock's films are full of 'ordinary' events. What makes them into melodrama is their juxtaposition and their occasional, judicious heightening. Neo-realism, the godfather of *cinéma vérité*, deliberately played down the melodramatic implications of its events and depended on building the narrative through detail which could be verified against our experience. Hitchcock controls and prevents this reference out. He manipulates our response. To turn away from that kind of cinema and try to find the logic of real experience and use that as narrative structure involves a moral as well as an aesthetic compulsion. Similar events may be dealt with—no less emotional because they are real. The search for that kind of cinema is difficult; the present state of the art demands that at no time does the film-maker lose our confidence. Believing, we see.

For after all, *The Family*, like *An American Family*, is in a tradition—a direct line descendant of the films of Flaherty, Renoir and Rossellini and of classical documentary, neo-realism and television news. With the development of light, noiseless cameras and fast film and transistor tape-recorders, film-makers were at first happy to do what couldn't be done with another technology; but they have recently started to try to make films which bring them into increasingly intimate contact with their subjects.

Thus the question of their own presence was raised. Some film-makers, like Rouch, made a virtue out of being there with the equipment—in *Chronique d'un Été* Rouch and Morin are the catalysts. In other cases the film-maker is a *provocateur*; in Cambridge (Massachusetts) Ed Pincus is 'appearing' in a film he is shooting; years ago

one of the Maysles speculated about making a film about an affair he was having. There is already enough 'autobiographical' cinema for it to have been collected by Gerald O'Grady, film impresario at the State University of New York, Buffalo.

For the last few years, there have been several strategies open to documentary film-makers:

a) You observe a situation long enough to make your analysis of it and then cause those most 'revealing' or 'characteristic' bits to be repeated. This is called directing. The people become actors. They are acting themselves. This is the classical documentary.

b) You observe but then start shooting the next things which happen, perhaps emphasising the cyclical behaviour because you can predict it. At one extreme this is called the 'fly on the wall' system, where the film-makers efface themselves and try to become the least important thing in the room. Early *cinéma vérité* and much of its imitators took this line.



Filming 'The Family': Gary Wilkins, Franc Roddam, cameraman Philip Bonham-Carter, sound recordist Peter Edwards, Terry Wilkins

c) You start off like *cinéma vérité* but you acknowledge your presence in the situation, and deal with that as a structural element in the filming. At the soft end this has come to be called observational cinema—at the hard end it is called participatory cinema.

So the question—'Do people really behave naturally when the camera is around?'—has to be broken down into which people, doing what, and in what circumstances?

It didn't take long to find out that the camera puts some people on their guard, other people on their best behaviour, and others on the next bus. Still others turn into actors. The first film we shot with the new cameras in California exhibited all four styles of response. What was surprising was that it was so easy to spot them in the rushes and still possible in the finished film (Henry Barak's *The Party*—sadly, it seems to have disappeared). In 1968–69 a group of researchers from Brooklyn State Hospital placed remote-controlled video cameras in private apartments. Their material proved

absolutely that people learn very quickly to ignore the ever-present observer. In other cases we can tell what effect the camera is having.

In *The Family* there is one such sequence when Heather and her mother are arguing about Karen, who has just moved into her own flat. Heather complains that her sister-in-law can't even stay in her own place now she has one. Her mother gives her an argument. That is stage one of the scene. In stage two, Heather steps up the argument. From now on Karen is going to come and visit only with her consent; if she doesn't feel like having Karen about, out Karen will go. Her mother loses her temper. Heather is going too far. Then comes stage three. In it I sense Margaret Wilkins putting the brakes on for the camera—not changing her position, but changing the way she expresses it, becoming 'reasonable' again. Heather on the other hand doesn't change. On the basis of the whole series, we can make a guess that both were behaving in character. We can also understand why

Margaret Wilkins so often leads the conversation and asks the questions which make the film-maker's life easier. She sees herself as a representative and she casts herself as the built-in interviewer.

There's a scene in *An American Family* which raises quite a different problem. Pat Loud goes visiting and tells her sister (or sister-in-law) of her intention to divorce her husband. The sister acts as the interlocutor, putting all the right questions. It seemed fishy. In fact Pat Loud had told the producer she wanted to be left alone that night—she needed time to think, and talk things over with people she trusted. The crew was sent ahead and the sister was persuaded to do the talking. Maybe there are references to that in the can, but by the time we come in Pat is already quite sloshed and talking openly. Something did not ring true, and although we get the information the producer wanted on film he lost another bit of our confidence.

Not surprisingly, there has been a great debate about all this in North America. It follows years of looking at and arguing

about the *Candid Eye* series out of the National Film Board of Canada, the Drew Associates films made by Leacock, Pennebaker, Shuker, the Maysles and others, the work of Fred Wiseman, and the later breed around the *Challenge for Change* programme, the various media centres (which provide community access to equipment), the cable television stations and the new ethnographers—documentarists with sponsors like the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ford and Guggenheim Foundations. A new breed are the ethnographic film-makers, Americans like John Marshall and Robert Gardner, their Australian counterparts Roger Sandall and Ian Dunlop, and other university-based people like David and Judith MacDougall, James Blue, David Hancock and Herb DiGioia.

Very little of this has crossed the Atlantic. Very few of the films have been seen; very little of the debate has been heard. And right into the middle of this drops *The Family*. What were the critics going to make of it; what were the viewers supposed to think?

Since the programme tried to present the Wilkins without overt editorialising, as an 'ordinary family', 'ordinary viewers' found themselves without the usual signposts or directives. They were put into a judgmental role, and they were asked to see each episode as evidence of a way of life.

A growing number of film-makers believe that this is a logical development in the 'democratisation' of the media. All filming involves subjective views, selection and packaging, and most non-fiction television producers conclude from this that it is their job to filter the information available for a programme in such a way that its natural chaotic state is transformed into meaningful patterns. British television does a good job of this in its regular features—*Man Alive*, *Panorama*, the *Money Programme*, *World in Action*. In such programmes the artist's traditional task of interpreting reality is joined with the journalist's. It is not necessary to denounce that type of format in order to argue for alternatives. They are a logical component of the educational uses of television. *Cinéma vérité*, direct cinema, observational cinema, are all alternative uses of television time. They move television from its educational to its informational mode. Thus *The Family* presented its audience with information. The audience was left to evaluate that information and come to conclusions about it.

At the primary level of judgment, simple moral verities were triggered by the first episode. No doubt many of these indignant people switched off the set, although few of them wrote as if that was a possibility. If the issue of 'typicality' was indeed a red herring, it had its uses in the early stages of the debate. It forced out into the open the discussion of private morality which was made inevitable by the choice of that particular family. Thus, joining the middle-aged Disgusteds and Seen Enoughs were others who argued that the early criticisms of the family were hypocritical, naïve, ignorant or at best intolerant. Many of these writers went out of their way to explain that they were middle-aged.

There's a good example of the judgmental

process at work in two different views of a sequence in Episode 5—Heather's scene with the careers adviser. Heather is being advised to take her examinations for the Certificate of Secondary Education, to capitalise on her education thus far. She's not interested. She wants to talk about working as a hairdresser, but the adviser has a different list—catering, the services and the C.S.E. examinations. Heather's response is to become quieter, more sullen and, we might assume, more dejected.

'Freelance', writing in the *Harrogate Advertiser*, had this to say: 'One could write a great deal about this programme; it is significant beyond brief definition, but on this occasion one writes only about the girl Heather, not yet 16 and, though obliged to stay on at school, quite stupidly determined to have nothing to do with C.S.E. or G.C.E. She is simply uncooperative, insolent and objectionable. She is reputed to be clever and capable but so far has shown not the slightest evidence of this. Her sole aim in life, and to her credit she has an aim, is to be a hair stylist. . . How many teachers who watch this interesting but saddening series would agree with me that the best place for Heather would be a segregated class where her uncooperative attitude would not be allowed to affect her fellow pupils?'

In the London *Evening News*, Angela Ince saw it differently. 'Heather, the 15-year-old unwilling schoolgirl, was the problem last week. We watched her slouching sullenly through what she plainly considered to be an extra wasted year of school, arguing with her family and being spoken to by a careers adviser. And as we did so, we learned more about the frustrations facing today's school-leavers than from any number of *Man Alive*, *Horizons* or *Panoramas*. Unlike many school-leavers, Heather knew what she wanted. She wanted to be a hairdresser and she wanted to be one now. Not exactly a reckless ambition. . . But from the reactions of those around her Heather might just as well have pouted a pretty lip and said: "When I leave school, I am going to work in a mobile brothel." ' Angela Ince goes on to describe the careers officer as making 'apathetic and absurd suggestions'. She compliments Heather's patience and courtesy in dealing with the irrelevancy of the advice, and concludes by asking if Heather was unusually unlucky or 'are all school-leavers advised in this lack-lustre way?'

The scene in itself has become almost obligatory in any study of contemporary schools. Ken Loach's *Kes* had one (fiction) and there is another (non-fiction) in Nick Broomfield's material for his new film on the rent strike in Huyton (Liverpool). Three film-makers look at a similar event and see the same thing. Two viewers, representative of how many more, look at the same scene and see something quite different. What to make of it?

According to one school of thought, a scene which is open to two opposite interpretations is a bad scene. I have some sympathy for that view in fiction—always excepting the deliberate confusions of thrillers or, say, *The Sting* or *Rashomon*. But I would have thought this does not apply to *The Family* or to observational cinema in general. Scenes can be taken as evidence of this or that, but faced with two opposite views, the viewer must look for additional

evidence to resolve the dispute. He is involved actively and is required to interpret the material, instead of passively accepting a pre-packaged opinion.

For reasons of politics, economics and technology, television is a gift of government. Without getting central government permission you can (in the West) set up a newspaper or open a cinema. But access to air waves and cable transmission is regulated. It is likely then that a country will have the kind of television it can afford and that fits with the political style.

In Britain there is little other than consensus politics on the box. The heavily editorialised programme is an exception, and the BBC has a sophisticated system of checks and balances to keep to what they can consider an acceptable middle line. One difficulty with this is that there is a tendency, even in the best programmes, to leave the sense that the subject has once and for all been dealt with. Neatly analysed from all sides (or almost all) and neatly packaged, it can now be forgotten. On a utilitarian view of education this has some merit. It would be nice to be able to move on. But if we assume that the learning process is continuous and organic, we have to keep turning back to the same problems and giving them more attention. Too much television is made as if it is the only show the audience will ever see. And having seen it, it is the only thing which will influence them on that particular subject.

There is a worrying tendency in some of the comments on this show, and it is matched by some of the noises coming out of Television Centre, that the experiment has proved its merit and now we can move on to something else. I would have thought that *The Family* had in fact only scraped the surface of that type of filming. It also suffered from what looked like some major strategic defects. By intending to feed in current affairs items as part of the narrative structure of the series, Paul Watson was possibly revealing lack of confidence in his ability to find enough of interest in ordinary people's ordinary behaviour.

For my money the first episode was marvellous television, and the early episodes in which members of the family were introduced had a unity and organic development which made the material accessible and did no apparent damage to the chronology of the Wilkins' life. Later, with that job done, traditional framing and editing devices took over from detailed observation. In one show the subject is the problem of a council flat for Gary and Karen. Near the beginning there is a conversation with the parents; we appear to move forward in time into a number of different aspects of the problem, and then come back to the conversation. By the logic of earlier episodes such framing was ruled out. Here we were back in conventional fictional structure, and I temporarily lost confidence in the 'argument' of the film. I had equal difficulty in another episode—Gary and Karen have their new flat, but Karen's first experience of living in it is intercut with other material.

D. W. Griffith and Eisenstein used parallel cutting to make what are sometimes called real movies. It is a device of fiction, since it allows us to compare two aspects of

the 'reality' which are not being compared by the actors or, in documentary, experienced by the participants. If the language of traditional fiction cinema has any usefulness we must respect its formal, grammatical rules. Thus its use in an otherwise observational film fictionalises the material. Since audiences for this series have had to learn to lose dramatic tension in favour of credibility, it seemed like a mistake to fall back on these fictional devices. But already in the material there had been used quite frequently the device of fading to black several times in the middle of conversations. Sometimes a scene was made up entirely of such short bursts—a word (fade), a look (fade), a brief sentence (fade), another look (fade), and so on.

The approach suggests that the sequences were interesting only as edited highlights. Take for example the sequence in Episode One—Terry and Margaret are taking Christopher through his school report. They are giving him the usual middle-class aspirant line, and he dissolves into tears. The sequence is made up of fragments, and in fact we miss the moment when something happens which makes Christopher cry. Perhaps the crew missed it too, changing magazines, or for a hundred different reasons. But the scene is castrated as a result and this is probably why so many viewers (and critics) felt it necessary to single it out for special attention. Most comments were that it was cruel; many of those worried about voyeurism were obviously upset by it. If the turning point were shot it should have been included, and the scene might have had more meaning. If it were missed, the whole sequence should have been dropped, on the grounds that it can never make adequate sense—the whole context cannot be given. Editing observational material is not a matter of cutting scenes shorter, but of cutting scenes out altogether.

By the time of the wedding, the group took another step towards fictionalisation. It was great fun to use the *High Noon* theme music for the will-he or won't-he get there. But it was an idea which should have been resisted.

Other people make a different kind of criticism of the series. Sean Day-Lewis of the *Daily Telegraph*, one of the few 'posh' critics who stayed with the series (and had earlier seen merit in Roger Graef's *Space Between Words*), wrote about Heather's school sequence. He liked it and sympathised with her. But he went on to say: 'Her troubles start at home. The older Wilkinses are also, to say the least, restricted in outlook. This is what makes their conflicts so painfully predictable and makes me wish they had been observed in one or two long programmes instead of twelve shorter ones.' I would have thought that the serial idea was actually going after other things and with other intentions than (say) Allan King's *A Married Couple*. By letting the family learn from the serialisation it must have made things easier for them. But if two or three hours of that stuff is really all that interests you, what can be said? Well, it ought to interest you more? Not a chance. Things on the box are only compulsive viewing, not compulsory.

I happen to think *A Married Couple* is a marvellous movie. It contains long scenes



'The Family': Tom Bernes

which must be among the best observed 'real' dialogue sequences in any documentary. Many of the same disciplines applied to Richard Leiterman's shooting there as to Philip Bonham-Carter's in *The Family* and some of the best stuff in *An American Family* (e.g. Joan Churchill shooting a family meeting). Leiterman shows uncanny ability to hold a whole conversation which is happening at two sides of a large room. We get the scenes whole, or as near whole as makes no difference. But entire sequences, entire events and episodes, were finally dropped. From 70 hours of film, King and his editor, Arla Saare, selected about 20 hours—discarding the rest for technical reasons or because nothing much happened, or because it was incomplete. What stayed in had value in itself and because it connected up with other material. The assembly (rough cut), which took about six weeks, ran four or five hours. Getting it from

Paul Watson, producer of 'The Family'



there to the finished length of 97 minutes took as long again.

The differences in cost must be alarming. *A Married Couple* cost just over \$200,000. Jack Gold recently got \$250,000 for *Catholics* from CBS, but the Documentary Department of the BBC can't spend that type of money. I have heard of figures like 'over a million' for Craig Gilbert's show, with more than half a million feet of film shot. Thus Paul Watson's ratio of 12 or 13 to 1 is unusually low. It means that they shot between six and seven hours of film a week—not a huge amount and, arguably, maybe only about half as much as they needed, in the circumstances. It's hard to say, without seeing the material.

From the production company's point of view, the serial format was arguably the best way of letting some of their staff get training in this type of filming. A good deal of the shooting wasn't very good—and although it doesn't seem in the long run to have made much difference, the images by themselves as well as in juxtaposition were often quite ugly. Everyone who has done a lot of that kind of work knows how difficult it is, and how much they have to keep in practice, like a concert pianist. Perhaps we will not get the great artists of observational cinema until the engineers learn to live with the relatively inexpensive, broadcast-compatible video cameras and the shooting ratios can be improved. But none of this is an argument for closing down the experiment at this stage.

Paul Watson's appearances on television talking about the show, and his article in the *Listener* (June 27th), are in a way less reassuring than the series itself. Perhaps he genuinely felt embattled—a lot of people in television in this country (or in any country?) think they are cut off and friendless. He is right to say the episodes were full of information about the state of the nation, not just the affairs of the Wilkins. And in many quarters he has not been given enough credit for it. But he surely exaggerates when he says: 'Once, there was no such thing as a means of mass communication. It was easy to ignore the plight of people, their needs or comments, yet even now, while we have the press, radio, TV, even the ability to talk to the moon, we have difficulty in transmitting views... that ask us to think, to question.'

The second part may be right too often, but surely not the first. In fact, the news distribution systems people have always defined their environment, and include all their people. We have always been able to learn of the plight of our people. What has happened to society is that the environment has changed. We haven't yet learned to live with that environment and we have not yet learned how to control the new distribution system, which in some crazy way has a life of its own.

But basically we have always known about our neighbours and have wanted them to know about us. Mass media have distracted us away from our geographical neighbours and have made us into global freaks. *The Family* is, or should be for most of us, a return to familiar territory. We can hope that the Watson crew can go on experimenting with the system, and that many others will too.

IN THE PICTURE

The Front Page

Billy Wilder quit his newspaper job for the movies in 1928, the same year that reporter Hildy Johnson first vented his ambivalent feelings about journalism in Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's raucously cynical play *The Front Page*. Forty-six years later, Wilder is back in the press room, directing the third screen version of the play, with Jack Lemmon playing Hildy and Walter Matthau as the ruthless Chicago managing editor Walter Burns, who is described in the screenplay as operating 'in the great tradition of Machiavelli, Rasputin and Count Dracula.'

A perpetual motion machine, his language as salty as that of the characters in the story, Wilder spews out a barrage of quips and insults, his thick Viennese accent filtered through a mouthful of gum now that he is off cigarettes. During a brief pause for lighting on the *Front Page* set at Universal, I asked Wilder if any of his own newspaper experience will be reflected in the film. His eyebrows arched in mock surprise: 'Hardly. It would be very censorable even today.'

The \$4 million production got under way in 1972, after Paul Monash, producer of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, saw the Old Vic's energetic mounting of the play in London. Monash approached Joseph L. Mankiewicz to direct the film, but Mankiewicz balked and Wilder was suggested by Jennings Lang, a Universal vice president. The director and his writing partner I. A. L. Diamond were then looking for a film subject. Their last two films, *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* and *Avanti!*, were bitter-sweet romantic comedies in the Lubitsch manner, and neither made much impact with audiences or critics. 'We felt we should go back to one of the classic farces of the 1930s,' Diamond said. 'We

thought of *Roxie Hart*, *Libelled Lady*, *Nothing Sacred*. It just so happened that these were all newspaper stories. Nobody has made this kind of picture recently.'

Wilder and Diamond both pointed to the relevance of the play in the light of the Watergate scandal, which has—fortuitously for *The Front Page*—revitalised reporters as movie heroes. Ticking off some of Hecht and MacArthur's 1920s jibes at governmental corruption, Diamond said, 'Nobody's going to believe that some of these things are in the play.' One line definitely not from the play has Burns blasting the mayor with the curse uttered by Watergate heavy John Ehrlichman: 'Let him twist slowly, slowly in the wind.' Wilder obviously revels in Burns' brand of vicious wit, pushing it beyond the extremes of the play. When I asked Matthau if it was true that the shy lawyer he played in *The Fortune Cookie* (G.B.: *Meet Whiplash Willie*) was modelled on the director, he said, 'I always play Wilder. Wilder sees me as Wilder—a lovable rogue full of razor blades.'

About sixty per cent of the film's dialogue is new, Diamond estimates, but he and Wilder regard the script as a faithful 'opening out' of the original, despite the cavilling of MacArthur's widow Helen Hayes. The play takes place entirely in the press room set, but the film ranges more naturally over Chicago, including scenes at a movie theatre where Hildy's fiancée works as an organist and at the headquarters of a 'Red' organisation called 'Friends of American Liberty', which is blitzed by the police because they think an escaped convict has sought shelter there. Wilder's is the first of the three screen versions to retain the play's famous ending line, 'The son of a bitch stole my watch!' When asked by a columnist if he

planned to change the ending, Wilder said, 'That would be like rewriting "To be or not to be", for God's sake. It's a classic.'

Brisk and meticulous on set as only a veteran Hollywood craftsman can be, Wilder supervises the most minute details of timing and texture. He demonstrated for Matthau how to rip out a telephone cord in two movements, the first light and the second abrupt. 'Zis is the first one,' he said, pantomiming the action, 'and the second zis is a ZUMP.' In another scene, telling Lemmon how to pull off a con game with Matthau to hoodwink the sheriff, he said, 'Look at Matthau. Be much more assertive, Jack. Come right forward.'

The simple direction to 'look at Matthau' transformed the con game into something more subtle; Lemmon's gaze, which had been wandering, was now transfixed as he regarded Matthau with wide-eyed admiration, and the scene became an expression of the characters' grudging emotional rapport. Wilder called out to Lemmon, 'Jack, could there be the tiniest little bit of satisfaction? Tiny, tiny, tiny...' The cinematographer, Jordan Cronenweth, suggested a close-up of Lemmon's reaction to Matthau, but Wilder rejected the idea. 'It's too important. Jack is very good in long shots and medium shots.' They did the scene in one take, and the camera operator asked, 'You want one more just for security?' Wilder consented, 'because I hate to work on a set-up for 45 minutes and finish it in three seconds. It's not fair.'

I mentioned Wilder's mentor, Ernst Lubitsch, and asked if he thinks it's possible these days to make successful pictures in the Lubitsch manner. 'The time for Lubitsch is past,' he said bluntly. 'It's just a loss of something marvellous, the loss of a style I

aspired to. The subtlest comedy you can get right now is *M*A*S*H*. They don't want to see a picture unless Peter Fonda is running over a dozen people or unless Clint Eastwood has got a machine gun bigger than 140 penises. It gets bigger all the time, you know; it started out as a pistol and now it's a machine gun. Something which is warm and funny and gentle and urbane and civilised hasn't got a chance today. There is a lack of patience which is sweeping the nation—or the world, for that matter. Noël Coward would not succeed today. It's all tough guys. Today you have to have a dirty jockstrap and a raincoat and be Columbo. They think it's very romantic...'

In doing *The Front Page*, Wilder said that he is trying to be 'as subtle and elegant as possible.' Will the time come when the audience may once again be willing to accept the Lubitsch style? 'No less a director than Ingmar Bergman plans to do *The Merry Widow*; let's wait and see.' But in the meantime what is Wilder to do? He shrugged, 'You are not going to buck audiences at two or three million a clip. What good is it being a marvellous composer of polkas if nobody dances the polka any more?'

JOSEPH MCBRIDE

Herzog in Dinkelsbühl

Just after the Berlin Festival, Werner Herzog was in Dinkelsbühl, near Nuremberg, shooting his new film: the story of Kaspar Hauser, the mysterious foundling who was discovered in 1830 wandering the streets of Nuremberg, barely able to make himself understood. They found out that as a child Kaspar had been bound for a long time to a chair in a dark prison; that later he had been taught to walk and talk a little and

'The Front Page': Jack Lemmon and Billy Wilder



then sent off on his own. Kaspar became a European sensation. Was he of royal blood, some son of Napoleon, a prince of the house of Baden, kept away from a throne by strange intrigues which seemed stranger still in that quiet Biedermeier period (the period, however, in which *Nosferatu* is set)? We owe to this story a poem by Verlaine and a novel by Jakob Wassermann. Juggling ironically with a German proverb in the manner of Brecht, Herzog calls his film *Everybody for himself, God against us all*.

Nuremberg is now a noisy, rebuilt town with fake antiquities. But Herzog has found an ideal setting: little Dinkelsbühl, with its brightly painted gabled houses and old town wall. Months before shooting, he discovered an old house there with a wild garden. He has remade the garden, clearing away stones and planting quaint shrubs. Indoors, he has chosen antique wallpaper, left only pictures of the period on the walls; over an old-fashioned piano we even find a portrait of Beethoven as a boy of eleven. Of all the young German directors, Herzog has the most thoughtful feeling for mood and atmosphere.

For his Kaspar Hauser, he didn't want an actor. Lutz Eisholz, a student at the Berlin film school, had made a semi-documentary, semi-fictional film, *Bruno, der Schwarze*, with a curious, asocial type, Bruno S., who spent the first twenty years of his life in and out of one reform school or prison after another. Bruno now works as a factory warehouseman; in the evenings he sings in the Berlin courtyards with his accordion, waiting for coins to fall from the windows. This solitary, uncommunicative man is Herzog's Kaspar Hauser. You find him wandering along the main street of Dinkelsbühl, looking just as out of place in ordinary clothes as in his brown Biedermeier outfit. He always carries some musical instrument—an old horn, since his beloved accordion had not been invented in 1830. The Verlaine verses 'Suis-je né trop tôt ou trop tard? / Qu'est-ce que je fais dans ce monde?' come to mind. And it does not matter that Bruno S. is twice the age of Kaspar Hauser, who was stabbed to death at only eighteen. With his round, expressionless face, Bruno himself seems ageless.

Among Herzog's team of tall young men, he looks rather small, awkward in his movements. He walks like someone who has just learned to move his legs. And as he talks with a strong Berlin accent, he pronounces the pure German text he has to speak with a mixture of hesitancy and over-emphasis. So he has become the ideal character for his role. And Herzog, who for *Land of Silence and Darkness* found the way to communicate with the deaf and blind, and knew in *Even Dwarfs Started Small* how to cope with inferiority complexes, also knows how to direct Bruno, in very short, intimate sequences.

Herzog is using direct sound, and even in quiet Dinkelsbühl this



Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's 'Karl May'

presents some problems. There is a scene in the garden, as Kaspar writes a letter to his benefactor. He forms the letters slowly, as attentively as a little schoolboy, while the camera watches from above, from a balcony. Then suddenly a helicopter from the nearby military airport is circling in the clouds, or it starts to rain. The sequence is broken off; the camera is installed in the large living-room. Bruno, who has not been called on for some time, sits strumming at the piano; suddenly he begins to play, rather well, some old melody.

For the deathbed scene, Kaspar's narrow bed is moved from the tiny bedroom to the living-room. Stabbed a second time by his unknown murderer, Kaspar lies white and motionless. By his bedside stand two Protestant clergymen. The one sweating in his heavy black coat is Enno Patalas, the film historian and curator of the Munich film museum. 'What a pity you weren't here for the ball scene. I would have put you into a lovely Biedermeier costume,' Herzog says to me. He has a habit of using his visitors as extras. Meanwhile, he's putting together some lines from different psalms for Patalas to speak—how wonderful Luther's strong German sounds! Leaning over Kaspar's bed is Beatrix Mira, who has just won a Berlin award for her role in Fassbinder's *Angst essen Seele auf*.

In the evening we see some rushes: quiet scenes, dense and intimate. It is not only for Bruno's sake that Herzog has written his whole script in short sequences. As in a miniature painting, dot is added to dot. The lighting is diffuse and subtle; even the costumes are in subdued colours—bottle green and black and dark brown. In *Signs of Life*, Herzog evoked atmosphere through slow

and feverish incantations, suggesting the beginning of madness; but here the tragedy of Kaspar Hauser's short and lonely life seems to be only touched on through small incidents. In *Aguirre: the Wrath of God*, that journey to death through Peru, Herzog seemed to leave his characters curiously on the periphery of events. This time contact is more immediate. He never romanticises the fate of this lost boy, but there is still something poetic in the simple way he lets the story develop.

At three in the morning, the unit set out to film Kaspar rowing on a small pond in the mist. I have not seen any of the location scenes in the rushes. But it won't be surprising if the fertile meadows and woods of this countryside, as Herzog films them, take on something of the strange impact one finds in the pictures of another Kaspar, his contemporary—the painter Caspar David Friedrich.

LOTTE H. EISNER

Ludwig's Cook

It is not often that profits from a box-office success are used immediately and directly to support films which deserve a wider audience, with total disregard for their commercial potential. Just such a rare happening has occurred recently in Paris, where the surprising commercial success of Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Ludwig: Requiem for a Virgin King* has made it possible for the owners of the Cinéma Marais to install two new rooms above their regular auditorium. The Marais is now dedicated to screenings of films which to date have been overlooked by distributors—with an emphasis on new German pictures. Syberberg himself attended the opening

of the refurbished cinema and the première of his new film *Ludwig's Cook*. Although he warned us before the screening that 'this one is quite different from *Requiem*,' he quietly agreed afterwards that it was not after all that different, 'because I stay the same no matter what film I am making.'

Ludwig's Cook was filmed in 16 mm. in the form of a guided visit through the haunts of Ludwig II. At first glance, it is not unlike the countless television tours of stately homes; save that the guide is an actor playing the role of Ludwig's retired cook, who relates all that happened in the kitchen during the monarch's reign. While mentioning in passing the events which composed the narrative of Syberberg's earlier film, and pointing out aspects of the rooms in Ludwig's castles and country hideaways, the cook can tell us about such things only within the context of elaborate menus.

A view of history that reduces the ultimate importance of everything to the level of dinners, breakfasts and picnics becomes hilarious after a time; yet it also creates a universe unto itself—thereby allowing us an unusual entry into Ludwig's character. His pain could have come as much from his rotten teeth (which made imperative his exclusive diet of soft foods) as from the inability of those around him to share fully in his creation of a completely artificial world, in which day became night for him and he breakfasted at dusk and dined in the middle of the night. So the dining habits of a man and his age become as telling as, in the same way, does the serving of meals in Rossellini's *Rise to Power of Louis XIV*—a film whose constructive influence Syberberg happily and readily admits.

The ironies of *Ludwig's Cook* are extended in the same directions

as those of its predecessor. The actor playing the cook begins by referring to the cook in the third person, only to slide suddenly into his part by relating past events in the first person, then to slide just as abruptly out of character again at the end of the film. So the film's documentary appearance is undercut, leaving Syberberg free to play once again in the elusive fields of appearance and reality. The non-German versions of the film have a voice-over narrative to translate the German on-screen narration. Since the German is not diminished much in volume, both voices meld in a duet of two languages to form a contrapuntal speech pattern 'distancing' the spectator still further from the supposed 'reality' of the documentary form. When it was suggested to Syberberg that the non-German version was a more complex experience because of the method of translation, he seemed pleased, for it was his idea not to use subtitles. The idea of a contrapuntal soundtrack also pleased him. 'I can't talk about film style except through musical terms. *Ludwig*, as its title indicates, was a requiem in its structure, while *Cook* is a chamber piece comprising a dominant theme with minor variations.'

Ludwig's Cook can be taken as a divertissement between the broad structural movements of a lengthy major work. The *Ludwig Requiem* is the first movement of a trilogy about the death of heroes. The second movement is being prepared for release. Entitled *Karl May*, it will recount the last years in the life of an author who influenced men as diverse as Fritz Lang and Adolf Hitler. May wrote what he pretended were true adventure tales involving American Indians, despite the fact that he had never been to America. Con-man, convict, spinner of fan-

tastic yarns, May suffered as much as Ludwig at the brutal onslaught of historical reality into his beloved hermetic world. Still, the film's realistic sets and costumes indicate that it, too, will be unlike *Ludwig*—save that Syberberg's basic vision remains the same.

The projected third part of the trilogy is to deal with the Nazi era. Syberberg is quick to emphasize, however, that we should not expect to see Nazi heroes in the film. 'In *Ludwig's Cook* I found a key to that universe through the kitchen. I think I have found a key to enter the world of the Third Reich without using Hitler and the others on screen at all. I don't want to discuss what that key is until I have developed the idea a bit more, but I think it will be interesting.'

DAVID L. OVERBEY

The Wild Party

They claim that the Mission Inn in Riverside is as exact as possible a re-creation of a genuine Californian-Spanish mission. If this is the case one can only suppose that the good fathers made their way to California by way of Shangri-La, for while the lower parts may represent a fair stab at the Spanish Colonial style, by the time your astonished gaze reaches the roofline it is all decidedly Himalayan. This somewhat baroque pearl in the crown of California lies in a now sleepy township about halfway between Los Angeles and Palm Springs, whither the rich and famous of Hollywood migrated soon after the war, leaving Riverside high and dry and the Mission Inn itself (where once upon a time Bette Davis and Richard Nixon were married—though not of course to each other) mouldering slowly in the smog-tinted sunlight.

Until the advent of the James Ivory-Ismail Merchant production *The Wild Party*, that is. It is based on the best-selling narrative poem of the Twenties, which seems not to have been filmed before, though there have been several films with the same title. The adaptation is pretty free, since the locale has been shifted from New York to Hollywood, and the two principal male characters have become film stars caught in the rush at the coming of sound. But the basic idea remains the same: a drama of jealousy and violence all taking place in the course of one night, one wild party. What was needed as setting for all this was something which could pass muster as a spectacular film star's home of the period. And what better than the Mission Inn, where one could pass at will from a Chinese banqueting hall (with genuine Sadie Thompson type raffia patio) to a Louis XIV ballroom or a Mexican baroque chapel (spoilt, unfortunately, as someone remarked, by a stained glass window that's 'only Tiffany') to bedrooms ranging from Douglas Fairbanks baronial to Cedric Gibbons moderne.

When I arrive I make my way through the labyrinth to the Chinese room, where they are in the middle of shooting Raquel Welch's big number, a little thing called 'Singapore Sally', in the course of which she has to climb up on to a huge Buddha behind the bar (it's that kind of genuine Chinese atmosphere), then do a high-stepping routine, half Dietrich, half Cyd Charisse, across the top of the bar with top hat and cane. It is all done in one take, shot simultaneously in 35mm from ground level and 16mm from up aloft. (It has already, I gather, been recorded in close-up and medium shot by the two cameras.)

On the last run through, which

otherwise goes swimmingly, she fumbles the hat right at the end, and then it turns out that one of the cameras ran out of film on one of the takes. At which point Miss Welch suddenly demonstrates that she is no glamorous automaton by springing into action, cross-questioning Walter Lassally and his assistant closely as to what exactly they have in which take, and how satisfactorily it is all going to cut together without any additional cover material. It takes about half an hour and the combined attentions of her dramatic coach, her personal choreographer and sundry assistants and attendants before she is satisfied and agrees to go on to the next shot.

Throughout all this James Ivory keeps his cool. I had wondered about this: one knows some directors who seem in private life as though butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, and then on set suddenly turn into monsters of temperament. But evidently James Ivory is all of a piece. He seems to work slowly and patiently, carefully explaining as he goes along, calming any insecurities of his actors and toning down their performances (since this is a slightly expressionistic period piece, the dangers of melodramatics and camp lurk like Scylla and Charybdis) with a quiet but firm aside. And yet, for all the appearance of measure, the film is steaming ahead at a great pace, with something like a six-week schedule. But what with the heat of the nearby desert, the overheated emotions of the film story, and the nightmarish architecture of the Mission Inn, it does seem rather as though Riverside is quintessentially a nice place to visit, but you wouldn't want to live there.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

Headless Wonders

A headless body blunders about the stage in Jeff Hale and Derek Lamb's *The Last Cartoon Man* while from the floor its fallen head insists, 'Over here. I'm over here.' 'A good symbol for animation today,' mused a German critic. Numbed by the Second Zagreb International Animated Film Festival's demonstration of largely mindless doodling, who could disagree? Hale and Lamb's four minute pleasure won the best script award, hinting that the jury, too, were as disturbed as entertained by the ominously titled whimsy.

But they botched their chance of giving the Grand Prix to the Festival's most intelligent film. Gerald Scarfe's BBC-TV production *A Long Drawn Out Trip* and Nedeljko Dragic's *Diary* co-incidentally competed with personal impressions of contemporary America. Scarfe's film is ruthless, original and—in terms of animation—exceptionally economical; Dragic's is tolerant, derivative and amazingly arduous. The jury, shrewdly taken around a gallery exhibition of Dragic's monumental

'The Wild Party': Raquel Welch and giant Buddha in the 'Singapore Sally' number



labours during the Festival, chose to put industry above inspiration. They gave their Grand Prix to *Diary*, and awarded *A Long Drawn Out Trip* the prize for the best first film by a newcomer—a category which Scarfe apparently insisted upon entering.

To see a jury which included Faith Hubley, Bruno Bozzetto, Bretislav Pojar and Ivan Ivanov-Vano saluting the drudgery of *Diary* seemed particularly sad in view of Dragić's open reliance on Steinberg and Steadman drawing. (Ironically, Dragić's own humour and draughtsmanship, at their best in his brilliant *Passing Days*, were shown to have been imitated in turn by another Zagreb animator, Borivoj Dvorniković, whose palely derivative *Second Class Passenger* mysteriously took first prize in the over three-minute section.) Dragić's final images of America show a bold Yankee front concealing a frightened little figure marooned in isolation. Scarfe concludes with an awful descendant of John Wayne and *Playboy*, a degenerated Nixon-Mickey shambling past warning signals, lost in a stoned haze.

Objections to Scarfe's magnificent diatribe appeared to be aimed against techniques which had enabled him to produce a twenty-minute animated film in six weeks (though he mollified a few die-hards at his press conference when he mentioned producing 320 drawings between midnight and six after one Los Angeles stroll).

The message of most films at Zagreb '74 was that obsession with the niceties of animation for their own sake could reduce this literally limitless art to mere frivolous decoration. Small, slick jokes, which were individually agreeable enough, ultimately seemed to be among the Festival's high spots. Milos Macourek's *A Bird's Life*, curiously prized as 'the most cheerful film', tells how a housewife who learns to fly rapidly finds her domestic routine transferred to the treetops. Fjodor Hitruk's *The Island*, already a Grand Prix winner at Cannes, shows a desert island survivor finding that love offers the only real rescue. Vaclav Bedrich's *Automatic* makes an adroit series of comments on life in a push-button age. Ted Petok's two-minute *The Crunch Bird* makes its single surefire joke with such aplomb that it won him not only an Oscar but, he declared, an exceptionally lucrative American release.

Two striking works by girls from London film schools shone through the remaining murk. Antoinette Starkiewicz's *Putting on the Ritz* would have won the 'first work' award in competition against anyone but Scarfe. As debonair as Astaire, it brings Thirties graphics, music and choreography briskly up to date with a lick of sexual cunning from the Seventies. Thalma Goldman's *Green Men, Yellow Women*, absurdly out of competition, fiercely

exposed the futility of woman's search for an ideal man in a world where even Clark Gable proves counterfeit. Both films had wit and flair enough to make one impatient for more from their creators.

Robert Bloomberg's *Animation Pie* is clearly set to become the standard demonstration work on animation instruction for children. Students from ten to fifteen show what they've done and how they did it, vividly revealing the great range of work and the huge relish with which they tackle it.

Such zest would have been welcome elsewhere. The majority of the films on show merely reflected the kind of hesitation currently afflicting every art. Even the endearing warmth and eccentricity of the first Zagreb Festival seemed swamped by the massive official support which accommodated films and guests on the outskirts of the town in a neighbourhood with all the charm of Gatwick Airport. A glittering new 2000-seat cinema projected all the films inaudibly, an achievement stoutly defended by the chief technician who insisted that every film must have been badly recorded. An equally stubborn determination to give the same amount of time to every category without showing the categories in separate screenings meant that most programmes sank under the weight of appalling instructional films or children's television episodes. Those animation festivaliers so nostalgic for Zagreb at last year's Annecy Festival found that at Zagreb this year they sometimes pined for good old Annecy. . . Animation is offering as accurate a mirror as any for the still shapeless Seventies.

DEREK HILL

Henry James on Location

The village of Otham lies in a fold of the Kent countryside three miles south-east of Maidstone. A pub, a school and a 17th century half-timbered house owned by the National Trust are its principal landmarks. Here, for three weeks in July, producer Stephen Bayly and director Tony Scott were filming the Henry James story *The Author of 'Beltraffio'*. Most of the shooting had been done in and around the National Trust house, Stoneacre, but on the day I went down the unit had moved across to the school and were filming an afternoon tea scene under a lime tree on the lawn.

The only British contribution to a series of five Henry James stories made for French television by Technisonor—of the others, two have been directed by Claude Chabrol, one by Paul Seban and one by Volker Schlöndorff—*The Author of 'Beltraffio'* is the first long film Tony Scott has made since his much-acclaimed first feature *Loving Memory*. An ex-student of the Royal College of Art, he has spent the interim three years making a couple of docu-



'I'm over here. . .' Dilemma of 'The Last Cartoon Man'

mentaries and a prolific and remunerative series of TV commercials. 'It's like 30-second feature production,' he said enthusiastically of the latter, citing his experiences in Guatemala shooting an exotic trilogy of deodorant adverts. (They're the ones that show a girl's back being sprayed through a tropical leaf and staying perspiration-free as she treks across such sun-baked locales as a desert, a jungle clearing and a Mayan temple.) Scott said that it was through his success with commercials and his founding of a commercial production company in Paris that he made the contact with Technisonor which led to this film.

Why had he chosen *The Author of 'Beltraffio'*? 'It was a choice between that and a story called *The Ghostly Rental*, which had been done in France five years

ago.' Though macabre in mood and denouement in a way that obviously appealed to the director of *Loving Memory*, *Beltraffio* also has a plot line nebulous and enigmatic enough to encourage an imaginative director to flesh it out with strong details of his own. Written in 1885, it's the story of a young American who visits the home of an English novelist whose work he has long admired. In the course of his stay, he witnesses a bitter struggle for domination between the author and his wife. The victim of their battle is their young son Dolcino: such a horror of her husband's writing does the wife have that, when a mysterious illness descends upon the child during the course of the American's stay, she chooses to let him die rather than live on exposed to the corrupting influence of her husband's thought.

'Monty Python and the Holy Grail', the latest large screen addition to the Python saga, directed by Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones



It's a story that sails perilously close to the absurd. In attempting to keep a balance between the melodrama of the ending and the nuanced, inexplicit manner in which James presents the character and ideas of the writer, Scott has changed the story in two subtle ways. 'We've made the child slightly stranger and more grown up. He plays a bigger role in the film than he does in the actual story. The other factor is that everything is seen through the young American's eyes, and at times we even go through his imagination to imagine what is happening. It's a device to get us into the child's bedroom at the end of the story; to see the wife reading the manuscript of the husband's new work while the child lies on the bed, dying.'

Scott and the producer Stephen Bayly have assembled an imposing looking cast. Tom Baker plays the novelist, Georgina Hale his wife, and a young American, Michael Shannon, is the visitor. In the sequence that I watched being filmed, all three seemed to have the perfect measure of their roles: Tom Baker was melancholy and forbearing, Georgina Hale icily well-mannered, Shannon bright, courteous, ingratiating. No contrast could have been more eloquent than that between the group in front of the camera and the group behind. In front, long dresses, hats, formal phrases and demure gestures. Behind, scurrying crew members, camera assistants coaxing some reluctant 'sunlight' from overheated arc

lamps, and the director himself, in pink vest, stubble beard and sawn-off jeans, frenziedly co-ordinating activities for the next take.

It's ironic, since Scott, his scriptwriter Robin Chapman and his actors have clearly taken immense pains over achieving an accurate period feeling in the dialogue, that the film may end up being seen only on French and German television dubbed into the native tongues of their respective countries. Although there is no certainty of Scott's film being seen over here, either on the small screen or the large, it is surely not too much to hope that some enterprising TV programme planner will take heed of the recent popularity of James in the classic serial department, and allow us in time to see all five films in their original form and their original languages.

NIGEL ANDREWS

French Disconnections

This summer, one of the big dailies in Paris—*France-Soir*—carried a report on the current state of French cinema, listing almost ten major films from which great things had been expected at the box-office and which all flopped, some very badly. (Resnais' *Stavisky* had only just opened when the article went to press, but it seems likely that this 'French *Gatsby*', as someone rather ungenerously dubbed it, will do

little more than recover its costs, something unprecedented for a film with Belmondo and the enormous publicity that surrounded the whole enterprise.)

What is disturbing, at least from a producer's point of view, is that the films were made by directors or according to formulae that had rarely let their backers down before: Chabrol, Lelouch, comedies with Mastroianni and Deneuve, Jean Yanne or Annie Girardot. And what must disturb anyone concerned about serious French cinema is that these same producers, who have lost money by playing safe, may now be inclined to play safer still. Since directors like Rivette and Bresson already have enormous problems in finding backing, one can see how difficult the situation is likely to become.

It would be over-simplifying to see any too easily defined trend in this inventory of failures. The films, although all 'commercial', were all very different, as were the reasons for their lack of success. Lelouch's *Toute une Vie*, for example, a ludicrously inadequate 'personal statement', which the director insisted was his 'first film', no doubt disappointed a public that expected from him a lightweight comedy-thriller (nor was it helped by a firing-squad of critics at Cannes); Jean Yanne's *Les Chinois à Paris*, a comedy about a Chinese occupation of France, was probably too sourly misanthropic even for the French; and Demy's *L'Événement le plus Important depuis que l'Homme a Marché sur la Lune*—the 'event'

or non-event' being male pregnancy—was a dreadfully ill-conceived project.

But these films did attempt, however clumsily, to offer something slightly out of the way, and it cannot honestly be said that they represent—on paper, at least—the lowest common denominator of cinema in France. With their failure (relative, in the case of the Yanne, to the expectations it aroused) and that of a half-dozen other, more conventionally inspired movies, will doubtless come the temptation to risk even less in the way of thematic and, certainly, stylistic novelty. That Lelouch, after his brief *séjour* on the heights of self-expression, may now prefer to perch on a less dizzying rung of the ladder, is probably a relief all round. But what of Resnais, who has admitted that he is only at ease filming with the kind of budget he had for *Stavisky*?

It appears that there are only two money-making formulae at the moment: pornography and cheaply made comedy. On the one hand, *Emmanuelle*, breaking records all over the country; on the other, an extremely successful series of vulgar farces, most with *En Folie* in the title (translate by *Carry On*). That we have been spared adaptations of long-running television series is only because no such thing exists on ORTF.

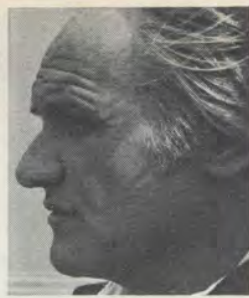
Is Paris burning? Not in the movie industry, at least, where all the fire, the passion of 1968 is now quite extinguished.

GILBERT ADAIR

Tony Scott (right) filming 'The Author of Beltraffio'



JANCsó PLAIN



Gideon Bachmann

Since material shapes the requirements for its representation, the methods of directors may change from film to film. Reports on a director at work are thus beset by the impossibility of generalising, except in the case of directors who tend to make the same film over and over again. It is fortunate that some of the great masters fall into this group, and repetition may end up being a cause why Fellini and Bergman will end up in a pantheon not accessible to capable men like Bogdanovich or Coppola.

Certainly this is not to say that Miklós Jancsó is a great director just because one tends to be unable to distinguish among his films. But the fact that what distinguishes them from each other is largely an increasing intensification of stylistic abstraction, helps one to remember their chronology; *The Round-Up* (1965), his fifth feature, held all the formal promise of the later work, but lining up the best of the films which followed it and analysing the degree to which each managed to perfect certain stylistic elements, even a layman observer will recognise that their sequence could be none but this: *The Red and the White* (1967), *Silence and Cry* (1968), *The Confrontation* (1968), *Agnus Dei* (1970) and *Red Psalm* (1971).*

These stylistic elements are: a reduction in the number of shots, a pre-montage in the camera, an increase in the number of possible levels of interpretation, elimination of the obvious, and calculated interaction of the following dialectic elements: foreground and background, sound and silences, prolongation and condensation of time, the logical and the illogical, the rational and the poetic. The visual cement is provided by Jancsó's extraordinary camera movements, by now his trademark, the refined orchestration of sensual impacts, causing a constant assault on our habitual lines of vision.

A particle of light travels reflected from an object to the lens in our eye, is caught as a lance on a pivot in the iris, its laser rigidity painting movement on to the retina. Our mind is thus accustomed to assume that a movement on the retina corresponds to a movement 'in reality'. In film and photography the lines are broken, because we regard a secondary image, with its own movement in the case of film, without physical connection to the primary image it purports to reproduce. Try to move a lens of minus 4 or 5 dioptres, through which you are seeing a reduced image of reality, up and down in front of your eye, and 'reality' will move with it; that is the basic effect of the cinecamera, except that we have become accustomed to accepting its falsifications. The effect has often been analysed in moral terms, but rarely technically; we know that reality in the cinema is illusion, but we chalk this up to a mystic

quality of the medium or the abstraction necessitated by the need to choose a viewpoint. Jancsó is the first who has not only perceived the technical root of the phenomenon but is using it creatively.

All this sounds considerably more complicated than it is, like all analysis after the fact. In practical, film-making terms, Jancsó is reducing traditional elements to a minimum and creating heightened motion consciousness; thus approaching, in cinema, a Hegelian definition, whereby each form of art has a single, central vehicle. For Jancsó, the definition of film is the art of movement. All else only serves its purpose: time manipulation, decor, colour, story, sounds and drama. But shining with pristine presumptuousness, it is the movement of the camera that creates his style.

A few weeks ago, Jancsó, his girl friend and collaborator Giovanna Galleardo and myself were driving back in a small car from the Puszta to Budapest, after rain had washed out a day's shooting on his latest film, *My Love, Elektra*, and lightning had struck the decorations, burning the straw roofs. It was a Sunday, and on the following Friday Jancsó was to leave for Rome to begin working for Carlo Ponti on his next film, *The Blood Countess*, to be shot in Italy near Parma. Half of *Elektra* (four shots) was in the can, leaving four more shots to go. The rain usually takes two days to dry. Jancsó had to finish the film before leaving. I was amazed at his calmness. He explained that he would finish the film on Tuesday and Wednesday, shooting two shots a day instead of one, and still make his plane. 'Are you going to come back later for the montage, then?' I asked. 'No,' he answered, 'I will do it on Thursday.'

Considering that he overlaps action at the beginning and end of each shot, and that

his main aim in cutting is to make even the seven cuts that this picture will require as invisible as possible, the feat seemed realistic. But the simplicity is misleading; this nonchalance (and the good story that it makes) is only possible because by the time he shoots, the work of making the film has already been practically finished. Putting it on film and sticking it together is only a requirement of the commercial need to get it seen. This shift to 'pre-cameratic' creativity is another key to his style. *My Love, Elektra* (the translation is mine; the film may eventually be released under another title) is based on a play by Laszlo Gyurko that has been running continuously in repertory in Budapest for the past five years. The play is an adaptation of the Greek original, and Jancsó has again adapted the adaptation, resurrecting both *Elektra* and *Orestes* more than once in the course of the 'action' and providing—in the script version, at least—a 20th century finish, where a red ('of course, red,' he says) helicopter carries the pair off and returns them to a world where perhaps tolerance may become possible, after all. A hope upon which, mercifully without elaboration, the film is to end.

Jancsó is working as usual with Gyula Hernádi, his favourite scriptwriter, a noted figure on the Hungarian literary scene. The camerawork is by Janós Kende, who has shot all the recent Jancsó films, including the ones made in Italy, and who must be considered as the third foot of the creative triangle. It is, essentially, the friendly, run-in collaboration of these three, the smooth, by now often wordless understanding they have of each other as people and of the material Jancsó throws up, that is at the base of the uncanny, almost oily accuracy of the finished products. Every angle, every meaning, every movement is worked out in elaborate detail as the rehearsals advance. The finished 'kép' (the pronunciation of which, a long, drawn out k-e-h-p, most suitably conjures up its meaning; it approximately translates to 'one-shot sequence', or, as Pasolini terms it, a 'piano-sequenza') is only the crystallisation of innumerable eliminations. In *My Love, Elektra*, the eight képs run to an average length of between 10 and 12½ minutes.

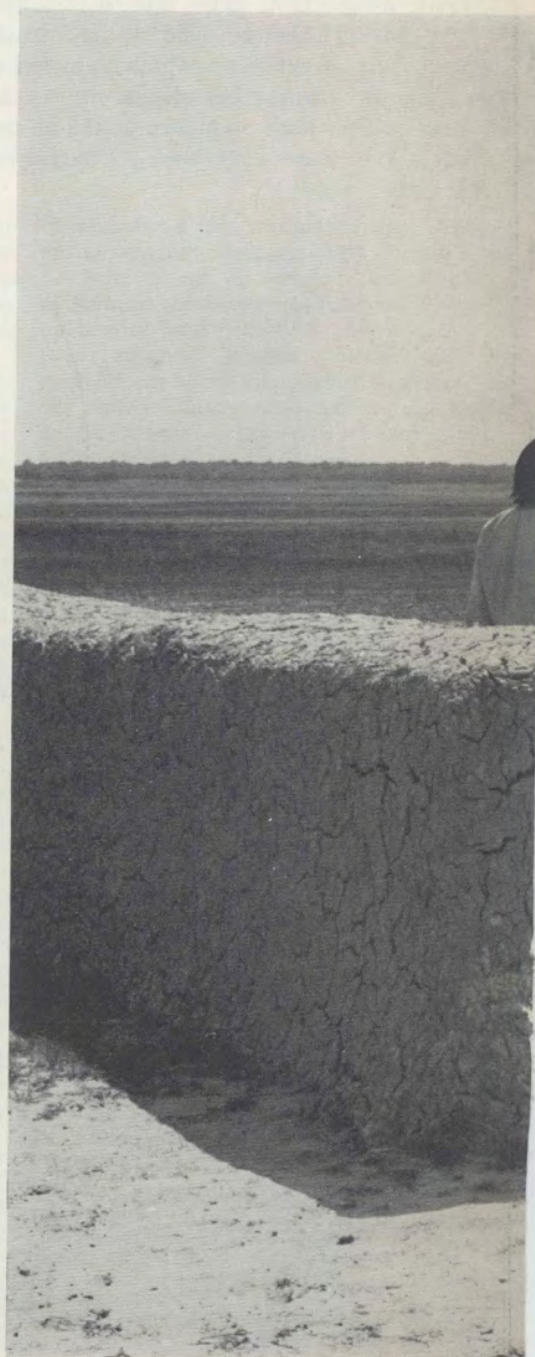
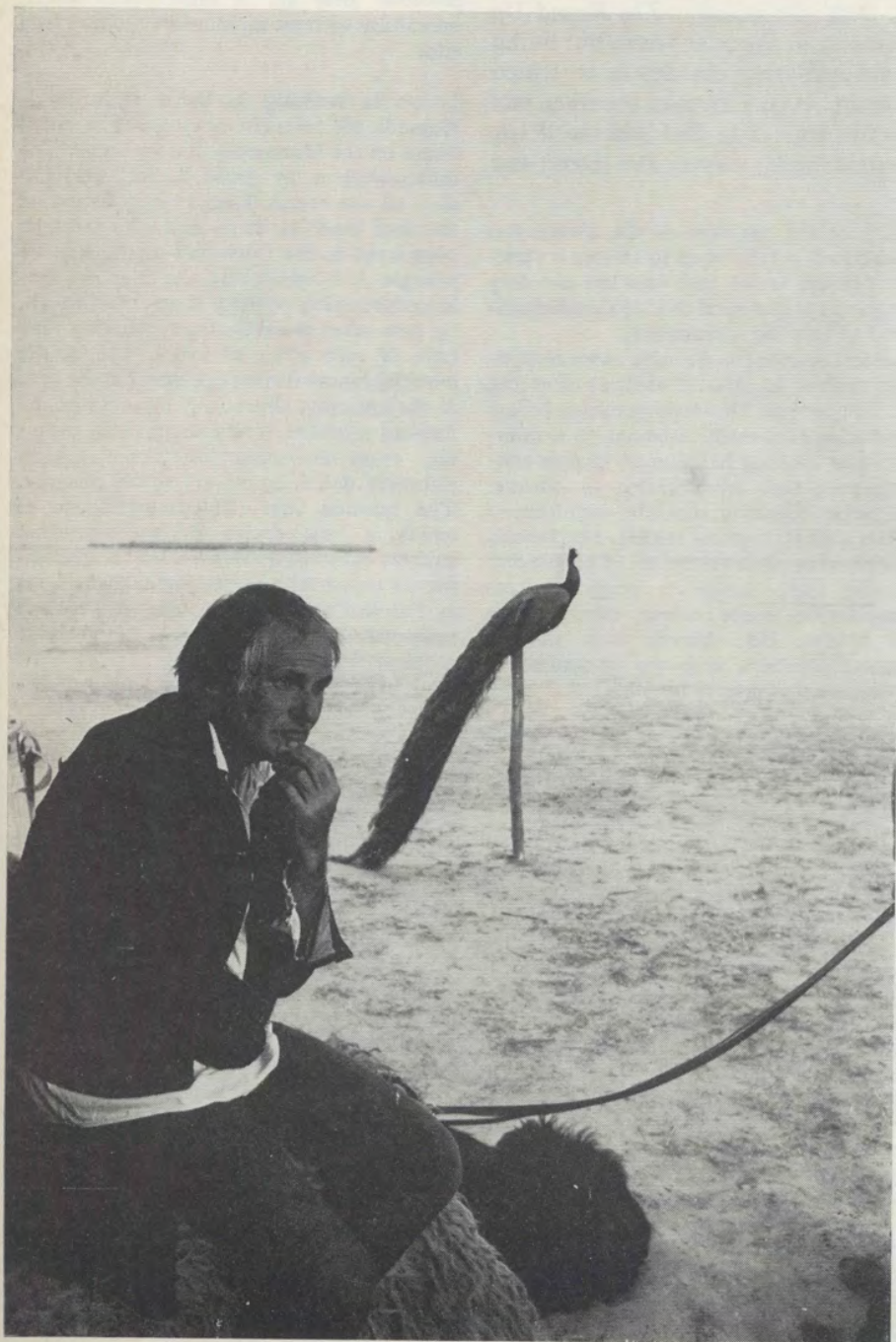
There is a script; it runs to about 50 pages and is based on the play, thus consisting almost entirely of dialogue. Every ten pages or so Jancsó has marked the top of a sheet with a scribble in his strong, somewhat angular but quite fanciful handwriting: 1st kép, 2nd kép, and so on. The spoken lines are theatrical, stylised, meandering monologues, some running to three or four pages of typescript. There is a bare indication of action, but no camera movements, no indication of focal length, no lighting instructions. Obviously, since the whole film is shot in a daylight exterior.

The set is essentially the Puszta, the Hungarian plain. The word itself just means empty, or devoid of, the place where naught is. It is the Apai Puszta, the 'small' *puszta* around the town of Kecskemét, more exactly the village of Kunszentmiklós, and *Agnus Dei* was shot here; the house which was the central element of decor in that film appears in the background of this one. I am being assured that the name of the

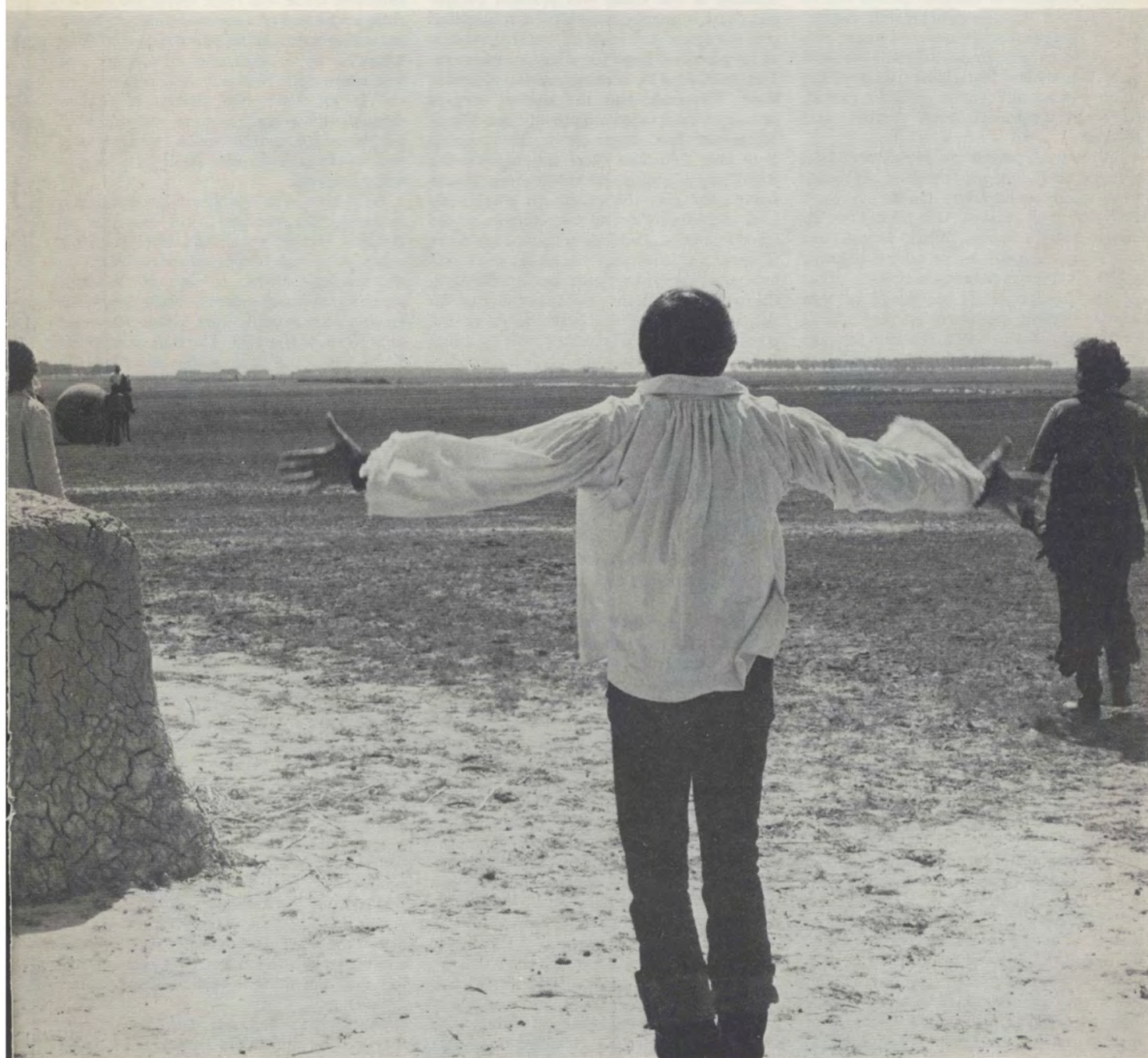
*This list does not include the two films Jancsó made in Italy in 1973/74, with the help of Italian television, *Technique and Rite* and *Rome Wants Caesar Back*, nor *Winter Wind* (Sirocco, 1969, a French co-production), which I have not seen, nor *La Pacifista* (1970), which I dislike. It thus contains all his totally Hungarian films and none of the ones made elsewhere.



Photographs by Gideon Bachmann



lançós
lekta



village ('the place of Saint Miklós') predates Jancsó's choice of it as a favourite site.

These plains are absolutely flat, grassy, clay alluvial deposits. Where a tree creates a perpendicular exception, you may be sure it has been planted by human hands. The rain doesn't make mud; it makes a slippery, grey mush, on which horses slip and fall, and which provides the raw material for the unfired clay-and-hay bricks of which Jancsó's decors are built. These are a bare minimum of structures: a gigantic hay loft open to the air on three sides, an open court which is basically just a thick mud-wall enclosure, some clay brick columns topped by a thatched lean-to and, in the distance, some round, pointed *trulli*, resembling those of Puglia, indicating the location of a well. Most of the structures are white-washed, resembling both the typical Puszta house and the Greek originals where *Elektra* might have been set.

In fact, the visual aspect of the place is indeterminate. This could be the Hungary of the Middle Ages or the Greece of antiquity. The culture of which we see manifestations is, as Hernádi points out to me, 'vaguely nomad-agricultural mystic' and not historically defined. As such, *My Love*, *Elektra* fits in well with Jancsó's other Puszta films like *Agnus Dei* and *Red Psalm*, which, while defining their period, liberally transgressed both history and rationale.

The king is played by József Madarás, the perennial epileptic priest from other Jancsó films, and *Elektra* herself by Mari Töröcsik, who played the daughter in Károly Makk's *Love*. What Jancsó has woven into the story is his central concern for the violence that men do to each other and the futility of it, recreating in this legendary setting his relatively conventional anti-Stalinist theme. We see the familiar hordes of peasants, chased by horsemen carrying torches emanating red smoke; the naked peasant girls (this time accompanied by naked men) going through elaborate, inconclusive rites, marching across the horizon in flashes of nude line-ups; an incongruous aside of a reflecting pool in which body paint has been applied hippie-fashion to the more attractive of the nude female backsides; and the ever-encroaching, circling whirlpools of bland-faced lackeys of dictatorship, just allowing the space for the straight lines of old women in white to march by, before unleashing their whips and cracking them ever closer to the group of the innocent, misled herd of the erstwhile faithful.

Essentially the work of putting all these by now familiar elements together is akin to that of an orchestra conductor, rehearsing one of his own compositions with his chamber group. Nobody seems much concerned with the content; it is all a matter of how the form chosen can best express it. There is no interference from the group in the message department; it is quite clear that Jancsó is the master provider and the apostle in one. As another Hungarian director, with a smile but not without envy, called him: the socialist prince.

The working day starts when the sun goes down. In the small houses of the village where the crew live, the members of the inner circle stir and move down towards

the end of the lane where Jancsó and Giovanna share a house with Kende. There may or may not be dinner, depending on whether anybody has thought of shopping. The assistant director (one of three) usually cooks; sometimes Yvette Biro, former editor (recently removed from office by party decree) of *Film Kultura*, Hungary's intellectual film monthly, and Jancsó's old friend and collaborator, does the chores. Hernádi, Kende, Gyurko (who is there the whole time, hoping against hope to salvage some part of his play), some of the actors, the set nurse, a singer and his girl, Yvette, Giovanna, myself, and an occasional technician or grip, sit around the table idly sipping a variety of Tokay wines and other spirits. Somebody has actually popped some corn, the singer's guitar gives out a few hesitant chords. It is the start of the session from which tomorrow's shooting will eventually grow.

The cross-fertilisation of historical epochs utilised in this film expresses Jancsó's view that the problems of mankind have not changed, and that despite the patent hopelessness of our social and political cul-de-sac, there is no reason to think that mankind will not again save itself by the thin strands of its perennial hope for a better tomorrow. In this *Elektra* he is using musical elements from Westerns, and the theme song is actually a composition made up by a young Hungarian folk singer about the mythical hero that Lee Van Cleef has become for thousands of Hungarian moviegoers. Jancsó is not only using the music: the whole song is in the film, including the reference to the actor by name. The first evening I am there is spent in rehearsing the song, over and over again, with everyone finally joining in the singing, and in adjusting the rhythm and the words to the exact needs of the scene in the film where they will be used. It is tomorrow's scene, and it is a scene between *Elektra* and *Orestes*. As the wine and the music get to all of us, slowly and warmly the problems are solved. In the end, long after midnight, with the damned song engraved forever in everyone's head, but the film assured of another well-ordained *kép*, we trundle home, each to his own Puszta farmhouse.

If you want to follow the creation of a sequence from its inception, you have to get up early. By the time I disentangle myself from the well-meaning daughter of my landlord, with whom communication is by word-*kép*, or single-word sentences, and realise that the loo is in the yard and breakfast not on the programme, the few cars that go to the set have long since left. I have to go with Giovanna, who speaks little Hungarian and thus is allowed late-comer's privileges, usually having a car sent back for her around 9.30. This means that Jancsó has been rehearsing for two-and-a-half hours by the time I arrive. It also means that the five hundred extras, who have come down from Budapest in a special train and a fleet of smoky buses, have been up since shortly after midnight. There is no overtime, but the day rate is still better than the factory, the school or the shops.

Of the thirteen girls and six men who will appear nude in the scene (apart from two of the main actors, who do the same), one is an amateur actress from a small street theatre

group in Buda, a few are models, one is a strip-tease artist, and the rest are either from the school of actresses or have been picked at random from among Budapest shoppers. To appear in a Jancsó film is like a ticket to stardom; the aura that attaches to me just because I appear to be a friend of his is immense. Weeks later, when I call up the Hungarian embassy in London for help with the translation of a Hungarian word, the switchboard operator, remote from her homeland but evidently imbued with national spirit, recognises the word as being part of the title of a film, and proudly adds '... directed by Jancsó.'

The actual preparations for the day's *kép* begin with the laying of the track. There is always a track, sometimes 60 or 70 feet long, curving in and out of the buildings, like a children's train set. But considering the complexities and acrobatics which the camera performs along its lines, these are remarkably simple, sometimes forming half an ellipse or the form of two 'J's, joined at the top and standing on each other, or just half or three-quarters of a slightly squashed circle. On these tracks the camera rides at the end of a counterweighted beam, extending some ten feet outwards, and itself balanced on a hydraulic telescoping lift, that can raise it twelve or fifteen feet in the air. If you have ever dreamt of floating through the world free from restrictions of weight or space, this would be the vehicle you would have to use. As it is, it carries only your eyes.

As Kende, who operates his own camera, including the zooming, and only has an assistant to help pull focus, rides atop this contraption with his eyes glued to the finder, the rehearsal starts. It can take a whole morning, and sometimes a whole day, often leaving just enough time before the light goes to shoot the take. The best description I can think of that might resemble the movements being rehearsed is a fish tank full of water, enormously enlarged to include the entire set with actors, camera, tracks and crew, with the camera representing a delectable lady-fish aimlessly gliding about in her three-dimensional realm, pursued by every living thing in sight.

For despite the fact that ostensibly it is she, the camera, that observes what surrounds her and moves to do so, in reality every movement is being planned for her and every action exists only for her approval. Thus order is reversed: it is reality which is set in motion by deft manipulation in order to be at the right place at the right time. As soon as she has passed them, actors jump up, throw off a costume or don another, run ahead of her along her planned path, and crouch down again ready for another fleeting close-up. Whole herds of horses, over whom she has passed, gallop in a wide circle behind her back to catch up again with their own image where it has been planned on her itinerary. And central actors, courted by her concentric embrace, move against her in their own curves, creating that doubly broken line of vision which makes some viewers dizzy. That is why the line of the track can be relatively simple: the major part of the movement is orchestrated for the camera in a ballet of calculated fabrication.

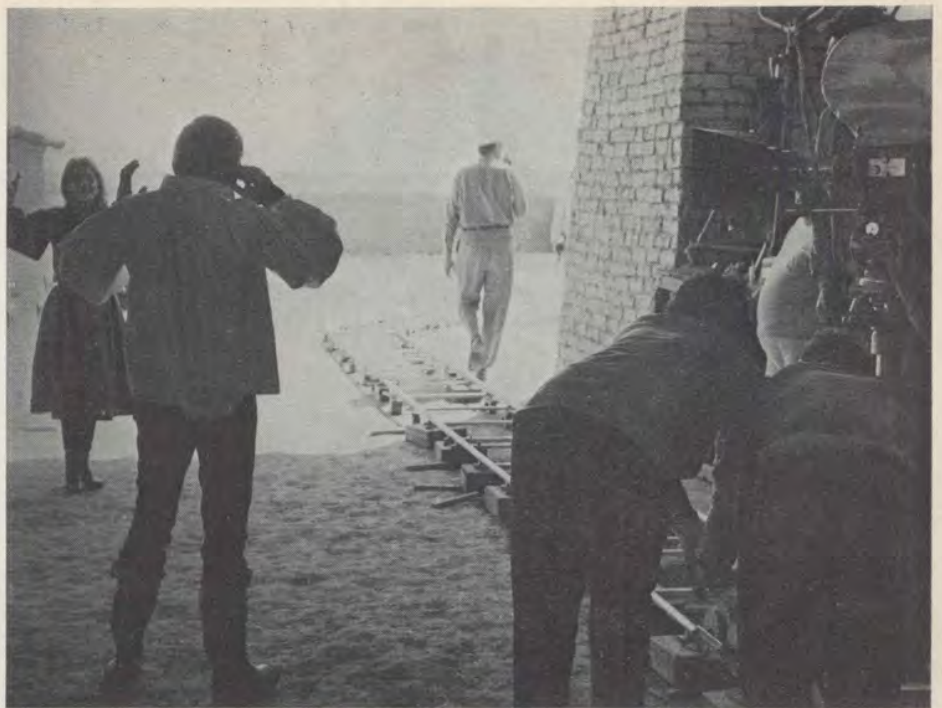
Lines are spoken, but in whisper tones; they will be dubbed in later at the correct

levels. The whole thing is a military operation of exacting accuracy. No deviations are permitted, a few inches off and a shot might have to be repeated. The same goes for the sun: a few degrees Kelvin off, and the colours of the shots won't match. I have spent entire days waiting for just that degree of cloudiness that the previous *kép* was shot in. On the day in question, the 500 extras had to return to Budapest without having worked, for just this reason. It may seem simple to say that everything is shot in one set in one light and in only eight shots with the whole montage created within the frame, but it isn't as simple to put this into operation.

The instructions to the actors are primarily choreographic. The main *personnages* are more often than not in the foreground, sometimes in full close-ups, while action of no less importance goes on at twenty yards distance behind and unsharp. There is a great deal of play with shifting focus, and a good deal of zooming, but the zoom is not used to approach or repulse an object or a face, but to change framing, and to arrive at the next object in the camera's path with a shorter or longer focal length than saw the preceding one. The differing psychological effects created by different focal lengths of the camera lens are taken into consideration; unlike many directors, who use zooming in its banal, TV-application of changing distance from the viewpoint to the object, Jancsó uses it to see a face in greater or lesser distortion, and with greater or lesser flattening (the first being caused by the short and the second by the long focal lengths). Thus, what the actors are told is only where to be at exactly what point, where to look and what to do, and how long to remain there. Since they have often participated in the previous evening's session, they know what is expected of them in terms of dramatic content without Jancsó having to insist unduly.

This spatial choreography, however, requires constant cues, and thus necessitates constant communication between crew and actors during the shooting. This is accomplished by a network of walkie-talkie systems, which activate loudspeakers hidden all over the set. Each crew member carries a broadcasting unit, some set for unison and some for diversity wavelengths. The air is filled with a constant crackle and electronic interference, and on the afternoon of the rainstorm a stranded loudspeaker in a lonely puddle in the middle of nowhere in the Puszta continued for an hour to broadcast happy weather reports being exchanged between ham radio sailors at sea off Sardinia. The wavelength had got tangled up in a resonance band. Needless to say, the Tyrrhenian sea was calm and the sun was shining. Fortunately, batteries manufactured in Hungary have a way of running down very quickly. After a while, only a sad occasional pip-squeak drifted in to us, huddled under makeshift straw roofing and freezing in clothes soaked by a cloudburst.

An uncanny *deus ex machina* atmosphere thus pervades the set. Everything is subjected to the tyranny of the camera path, and everyone who sees something about to go wrong begins to scream into his walkie-talkie, adding to the general din. Jancsó him-



Jancsó on location: '... there is always a track ...' Photograph by Gideon Bachmann

self is more irascible than one would expect under the suave exterior of the socialist prince, who in his private life and interviews seems totally imperturbable. He is wont to scream at the top of his voice and let loose the worst of Hungarian curse words (also one of the commonest of that language of the steppes, and meaning the sexual organ of a horse). But he returns equally fast to total equilibrium when his outburst has done its work of pulling things back into shape.

While rehearsals can go on a whole day, shooting is short. Each *kép* is usually repeated only four or five times, rarely going to seven or eight takes. The same night the exposed film is developed, after having been rushed to the studio in Budapest, and after four days of shooting, I was able to view the first half of the film in rushes. It is, of course, unlike any screening of rushes I had ever attended: seeing the four shots, I had seen the first half of the finished film. The Hungarians use Kodak emulsions, but they develop it themselves, and they develop it excellently well. Within hours of its arrival, positive rushes are printed. Work-print seems as good in quality as a corrected one.

Although the cutting can be taken care of in a single day, that doesn't of course mean that the film will actually be ready to be projected as soon as it's been edited. In fact, the whole process of finishing it takes a lot of work, and it is only because over the years Jancsó has managed to develop a faithful and well-trained staff of collaborators that he can afford to be absent from Hungary while the film is being looped for synchronisation, dialogues are being re-recorded, the soundtracks are mixed and finally a print is married. Clearly he will have to return to Hungary when some of this work has been done, and the film will not, in effect, be ready to be seen before the autumn or early winter.

But all these are technical necessities which Jancsó considers essential but extraneous to his creative work, and it is the

warm and fertile moment of the evening discussions which precede the shooting and the detailed, critical preparation of the camera movements that make up the exciting moments of film-making for him. There is always singing and a bit of drinking, friends drive down from Budapest, it is a real festivity. In fact, when he is not shooting, the circle of his friends and collaborators in Budapest is a little less alive, a little less connected to the stream of life. He has the ability to make each and every person feel important, never contradicts anyone directly, and achieves his devotions obliquely; like a truly encompassing creator he is automatically at the centre of all activities he shares. Even when he sings, as he often does, with a smile of ridicule but also an air of nostalgia, the old partisan songs from his youth, people join in without the comments which in today's Hungary normally greet expressions from the romantic days. In a country that has come a long way from one form of Stalinism and has still not accepted that it is heading for another, the leisurely disdain for the generation of the war is one of the few ways of manifesting a rebellious spirit.

In 1945 Miklós Jancsó was 23, and was active in the free university movement of those days; *Confrontation* is his real story. He was formed under Stalinism, and it has remained, in one form or another, a major influence. 'I am an expert of Stalinism,' he says, 'but that no longer interests anybody today. I am no longer young. I have done many things in my life, all useless. I no longer believe in big causes. Now I want to do different things, cook, for example. And to discover physical relationships, direct relationships. In my films I want to show that humanity can't go on the way it's going. On the other hand, I have played Christ long enough. What's the point? We know how the end will come. In fact, sometimes I think we're a bit ahead of schedule.'

The COMPLEX SEER:

BRECHT AND THE FILM

Any comprehensive attempt to assess the nature of Brecht's relationship to the cinema would have to explore four quite distinct areas of investigation. The first of these (briefly) concerns Brecht's use of film fragments within the context of his theatrical presentations. The second would concentrate on Brecht's entanglement with the film industry itself in Germany (in the early 1930s) as well as in America (during the 1940s). The third would examine the possible influence of film artists such as Eisenstein and Chaplin on the initial formulation of Brecht's theories of epic theatre. The fourth—and ultimately the most crucial in terms of its contribution to aesthetic thinking in the twentieth century—is concerned less with Brecht's actual contacts with film as a material of expression, than with the impact of his theoretical writings on a generation of European directors whose collective body of work since 1960 constitutes an achievement as momentous, historically and aesthetically, as that of the Cubist painters fifty years before. The films of Godard, of Straub, of Makavejev, of Ruy Guerra, of Nagisa Oshima and others, all, though in various and sometimes divergent ways, bear the clear imprint of Brechtian principles. The elaboration of this latter assertion must await another occasion; here I take my task to be to sketch an outline of Brecht's personal contacts with the film medium, and then to locate his thought within a larger context of European thinking in order to explain his exemplary significance for a particular strand of film-making.

The best known (and ultimately the least important) of Brecht's contacts with the cinema revolves round his use of film as an integral element of the staging of his plays. Following the example of Piscator, Brecht found not only that 'the film was a new gigantic actor that helped to narrate events . . . by means of which simultaneous events in different places could be seen together,' but that 'the use of the film projection' helped 'bring the social complex of the events taking place to the forefront.'¹ Thus at the end of *Mother Courage*, Mother marches in front of a screen on which footage is projected from *October* and *The End of St. Petersburg*, as well as documentary images of Lenin, Stalin and Mao.

What we must note here is not simply the bringing of 'the social complex' into the forefront, but also the calculated disjunction of conventional theatrical illusion. A tension is set up between the presence of an actor and the presence of an autonomous series of images on a screen; the relationship between the two is not internally motivated; their co-presence is not explicable in terms of dramatic necessity; rather, it is a deliberately interruptive mechanism, a mechanism that *demands* that the audience sit up and reflect on its significance. This usage is an integral part of Brecht's thrust toward 'objectification', his desire to establish ruptures and tensions that make explicit his rejection of the common notion of theatre as a passive experience. In this sense, Brecht's use of film parallels his use of songs to break the continuity of the action, of gestural acting, and of the results of the 'electrification' of theatrical mechanics: projected titles, moving platforms on the stage, and so on. Brecht's interest in film is simply as an extension of the expressive possibilities of the theatre—there is little apparent interest in the exploration of cinematic potential *per se* in his theatrical practice.

If Brecht's use of film in his own creative endeavours earns no more than a footnote in film history, we can claim little greater significance for his forays into the world of feature film-making, since each project (from Brecht's point of view) degenerated into aesthetic disaster. But these encounters are worth examination, since the problems Brecht confronted illuminate the schism between his aesthetic and that of the narrative film tradition as it mainly evolved in Europe and America.

The first of Brecht's ventures into cinema (with the exception of some screenplays he reputedly wrote in the Twenties, but which have since disappeared) occurred in 1930, when it was proposed that one of his plays should be adapted for the screen. This was *The Threepenny Opera*, and G. W. Pabst was slated to direct. Brecht's play, to use his own words, 'is concerned with bourgeois conceptions, not only as *content* by representing them, but also through the manner in which it does so.' That is to say, it is not enough to discuss radical or revolutionary ideas—they must be discussed in a new format. This realisation was made explicit by Walter Benjamin, the German critic and close friend of Brecht, when he lectured in Paris in 1934. Benjamin said that:

¹ *Brecht on Theatre*, Ed. and trans. by John Willett, Methuen, 1964.

'Transmitting an apparatus of production without—as much as possible—transforming it, is a highly debatable procedure even when the content of the apparatus which is transmitted seems to be revolutionary in nature. In point of fact we are faced with a situation—for which the last decade in Germany furnishes complete proof—in which the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication can assimilate an astonishing number of revolutionary themes, and can even propagate them without seriously placing its own existence or the existence of the class that possesses them into question.' ('The Author as Producer', *New Left Review*, July/August 1970)

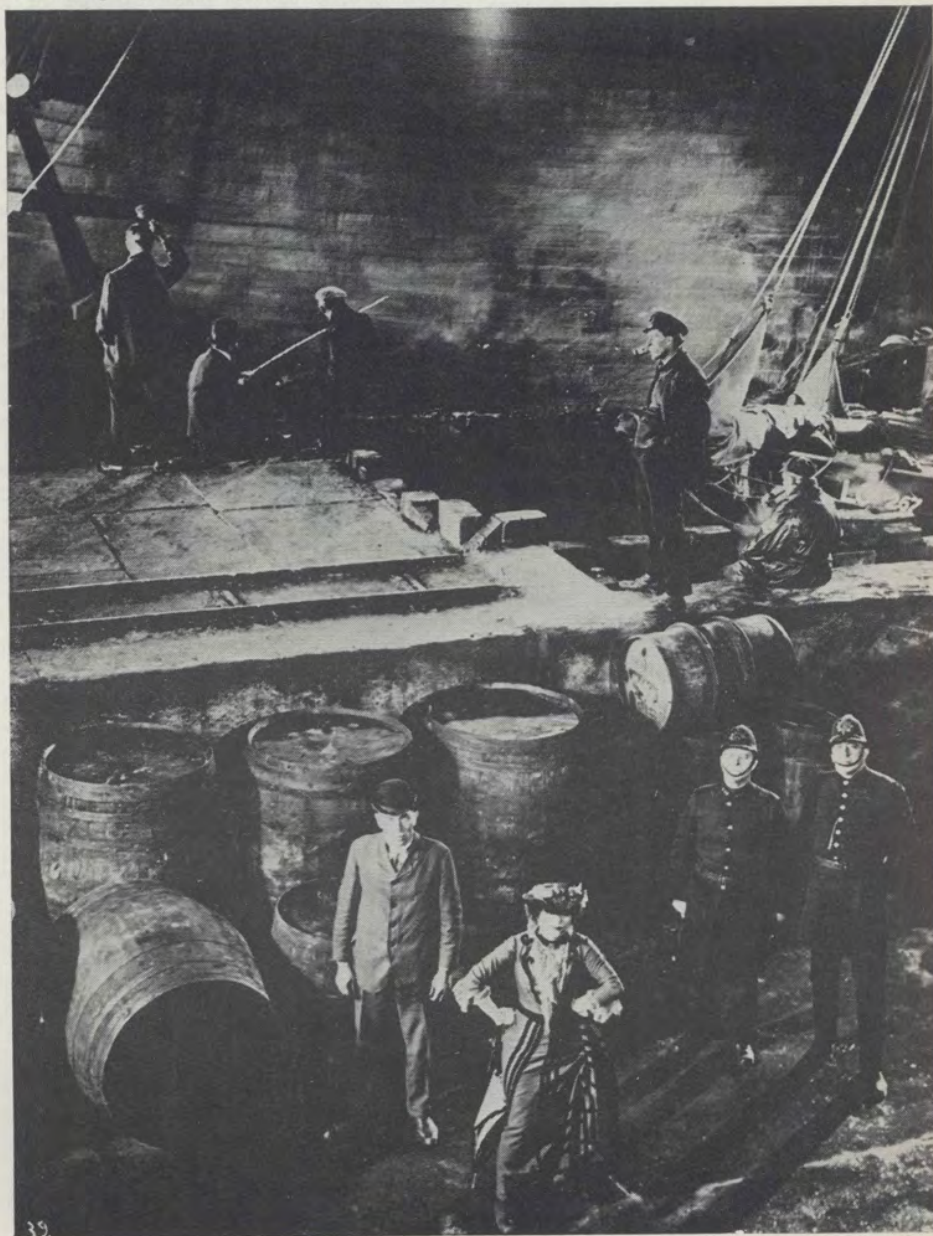
The truth of this becomes immediately apparent if we shift our focus momentarily to the welter of 'political' films with which the American film industry has saturated the down-town cinemas over the past five years; by the very nature of their presentation as commercial entertainment narratives within the context of plush theatres, any potential 'radicalising' impulse is efficiently anaesthetised. Benjamin's 'apparatus of production' embraces not only the conditions of transmission of the work, however, but also its formal, technical aspect. The traditional forms of expression must also be transformed, and here we may note a particular closeness between the approaches of Benjamin and Brecht.

Certainly it was Brecht's formal innovations in *The Threepenny Opera* that marked the play as a radical work. Again let me quote Brecht's own notes on the play: 'So far as the communication of the subject-matter is concerned, the spectator must not be misled along the path of empathy . . . the actor addresses himself directly to the spectator . . . When he sings, the actor accomplishes a change of function. Nothing is more detestable than when an actor gives the impression of not having noticed that he has left the ground of plain speech and is already singing. The three levels—plain speech, heightened speech and singing must always remain separate from one another . . . Complex seeing must be practised.'²

When Pabst's film was released in 1931, it was apparent that it was precisely these formal aspects that had been eliminated in the transposition of Brecht's script to the screen. Although several actors from the original stage production appeared in the film, although the songs were sung by actors trained in Brecht's singing techniques, and although the costume style was faithful to Brecht's production, Pabst's mode of articulation undercut Brecht's epic, objectifying thrust. Pabst's interest in the romantic aspects of the story, his attempt to create a 'hovering phantom world' through the pans and travelling shots of his mobile camera, his emphasis on chiaroscuro lighting—all these aspects coalesce to produce a work which, while satisfying in its own way,³



'The Threepenny Opera': placards for Brecht, chiaroscuro for Pabst



² Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera*, trans. D. Vesey, Grove Press, New York, 1964.

³ It is perhaps worth observing that Pabst's 'alterations' to Brecht's script are perfectly consonant with the critical assumptions of the 'auteur' theory. In its own terms, and within the total context of Pabst's work, *The Threepenny Opera* stands as a major piece of work. However, elucidation of Pabst's achievement is not my purpose here, and I shall let my bias in Brecht's favour stand.

utterly lacks Brecht's abrasive satiric edge. Whereas Brecht's placards and austere mathematical sets gave a sense of immediacy, of provocation, of shock, Pabst's use of Andreiev's set designs resulted in something closer to baroque ornamentalism, enabling Lotte Eisner to effuse in *The Haunted Screen*:

'Swirls of dust and smoke wreath the dwellings of the beggar king, and cling to the bare walls, where wretches' rags are like ornamental blobs of paint, and hover in the nuptial shed on the docks, softening the splendour of the tables brimming with fruit and silverware amid the reflections of the gentle candlelight.'

To clinch the subversion of Brecht's intentions, Kurt Weill's songs are reduced to embellishments in the film, instead of constituting its pivotal points. Pabst does this very simply: although the songs are sung in a manner not wholly incompatible with Brecht's methods, their narrative centrality is slashed by the way in which Pabst minimises their *visual* presence on the screen. In the opening of the film, for instance, the 'Mack the Knife' song merely functions as a backdrop to the nascent love affair between Mack and Polly, as Pabst concentrates on Mack lasciviously eyeing Polly.

Not surprisingly, Brecht sued the production company for what he saw as a negation of the ideological and stylistic substance of his work, and the case of 'Brecht v. Nero Films' became a *cause célèbre* in Berlin. Brecht lost his case; the details need not concern us here. What did come out of the trial, however, was Brecht's only sustained piece of writing on the cinema; and, significantly, he rejects consideration of film aesthetic and theory, preferring instead to examine the relationships between law, art and the economic substructure.

The court's verdict established that when Brecht sold the rights of *The Threepenny Opera* to Nero films, he thereby forfeited his right to control the content of his work, on the grounds that were this *not* the case, the success of the economic enterprise represented by the film industry would be jeopardised. Brecht's response was a Marxist critique of the capitalist foundations of the cinema, an exposure of its principles of exploitation. He pointed out what, thirty years later, became a primary concern of both the American Independent Cinema and the French New Wave: that the capitalist foundations of cinematic practice efficiently removed a means of expression from the grasp of a whole stratum of creative artists. Access to the medium is controlled by capitalist expediency, which thus becomes a form of political censorship (through suppression), at the very time when the persuasive potentials of audiovisual media were being fully recognised—Hitler commissioned *Triumph of the Will* just four years later (having first, ironically, banned Pabst's *The Threepenny Opera* when he came to power in 1933).

What Brecht demanded was that both the courts and the critics should reconsider the social function of film:

'As long as the social function is not criticised, then all film criticism is symptomatic criticism and itself has a symptomatic character. It exhausts itself on questions of

taste and remains completely imprisoned in class prejudice. It never recognises that taste is merchandise and the weapon of a particular class, but rather it sets taste up as an absolute (which everyone has access to, which everyone can buy, even if, in fact, everyone cannot pay).'⁴

It is here, more clearly than almost anywhere else in his writing, that Brecht's communist commitment is expressed; and shortly afterwards, in late 1931, Brecht began work on the script of *Kuhle Wampe*, known in the West as *Whither Germany?*. The film was partly financed by a Russian company, and it gained instant notoriety as the only communist film to be made in Germany during the Thirties. It was predictably banned (though a cut version was subsequently exhibited), and is difficult to see today. But its subtitle, *To whom does the world belong?*, clearly hints at its subject matter, and accounts suggest that Brecht succeeded in transmitting his ideological beliefs to the screen. He and the director Slatan Dudow worked closely and apparently harmoniously together, and the film managed to make its general social statement: the censor complained that one of its central events, the suicide of a young worker, was presented provocatively as typical of the destiny of a whole class, rather than simply as the tragic destiny of a particular individual! Stylistically, however, the film appears to be fairly conventional, having none of the innovatory spirit that characterised the formal aspects of Brecht's stage work.

Brecht had no further involvement with film-making until he arrived in Los Angeles in 1941; shortly thereafter he began work with his compatriot in exile, Fritz Lang, on *Hangmen Also Die*. And again the experience was an unhappy one. Although it was not to be expected that Lang's dourly fatalistic vision could be reconciled with Brecht's progressive experimentalism, the problem was further compounded by the fact that, since Brecht spoke little English, another writer, John Wexley, had to be called in to assist. Inevitably conflicts arose, and the accounts vary. Some claim Wexley demanded sole screen credit, and was granted it by the Screen Writers Guild; others claim that Brecht refused to have his name credited, allowing only 'from an idea by Brecht', because of what he considered a substantial distortion of his intention.

From this point on, it is clear that Brecht regarded his work in the cinema as simply a means to earn his living. Hollywood was always eager to secure 'name' writers, and Brecht churned out scripts, which were so chewed over in the studio factories that his ideas were invariably modified beyond recognition. A good example is *Arch of Triumph*, made in 1947 by Lewis Milestone, and adapted from a novel by E. M. Remarque. Remarque, like Pabst, belonged to the 'New Objectivity' school which Walter Benjamin scathingly characterised by saying that 'It has even succeeded in making misery itself an object of pleasure, by treating it stylishly and with technical perfection.' It is perhaps hardly surprising

that a Hollywood studio should feel attracted to such material, but it is ironic that Brecht should have found himself caught in the process of transposition. He was always given German materials to work with, and the studio bosses evidently felt that national identity was sufficient foundation for success. But this clearly was not the case, ideological, philosophical and aesthetic compatibility being necessary elements that Brecht never found in his dealings with the cinema. As he wrote sadly in a poem entitled 'Hollywood',

'Every morning, in order to win
my bread,
I display myself in the market
where one sells lies.
Full of hope,
I align myself with the salesmen.'

Economic necessities ironically, even tragically, forced him to enter the ranks of those whom he had so bitterly attacked in *The Threepenny Opera* court case. Even this, however, did not make him 'safe' politically; late in 1947 he was (like Chaplin and like Joseph Losey, who directed the first American production of *Galileo*) harassed by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Testifying before the Committee before he returned to Europe in November, 1947, Brecht said, 'I am unaware of any influence, political or artistic, that I could have exercised on the film industry.' And indeed no such influence was apparent until after his death in 1956—and then it was not in America that it was to be found.

After fleeing political persecution for the third time in his life (first Germany, then Finland as the Germans prepared to invade, and finally America), it is hardly surprising that Brecht's revolutionary ardour was somewhat dampened in his later years. (This is evident if one compares his writing of the late Twenties with that of the late Forties and early Fifties.) Indeed the image of the later Brecht is perhaps commensurate with the figure of Galileo at the end of that play: not having betrayed his past, but withdrawn from public combat. Thus it is not surprising that it is to the earlier writings that we find the radical European film directors of the 1960s turning their attention. (Godard's *Tout Va Bien*, for instance, is explicitly indebted to Brecht's 'Notes to the opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*'.) And it is unquestionably these earlier writings that provide the link I wish to make between Brecht and a cinematic tradition that runs from Eisenstein to Godard.

The aesthetic position which Eisenstein, Brecht and Godard hold in common is a hostility to illusionism; illusionism being a mode of artistic experience that has as its most central characteristics: a desire to (psychologically) penetrate individual experience; its primary appeal is to the emotions rather than the intellect, desiring the audience's empathetic involvement with the events presented before them, in the passive manner suggested by Coleridge's 'willing suspension of disbelief'; it has a closed form which implies a certain artistic autonomy, a self-validation; it prefers to regard the medium of expression as somehow transparent, neutral, having no 'point

⁴ Translated by Julia Lesage [from *Sur le Cinéma*, by B. Brecht, Paris, L'Arche, 1970] in *Cinéaste*, Vol. V, No. 2, Spring 1972.



'Kuhle Wampe': 'the only communist film to be made in Germany during the thirties'

of view' of its own; language wants to be overlooked, effaced. Brecht's theatrical practice obviously inverts *all* of these priorities, and his theoretical writings constantly stress the contemporary necessity of a rethinking of dramatic praxis. His theatre may thus be seen as a reaction against a tradition that had lasted several hundred years; a reaction against the perspectival tradition of the post-Renaissance world, which posited the eye (and man behind it) as the centre of the world, and art as a window (therefore transparent) on that world.

In film, the reaction against this tradition has tended to be submerged beneath an 'ideology of the visible'; for the image produced by the camera could easily confirm and reinforce 'the visual code defined by Renaissance humanism' which placed the human eye at the centre of the system of representation. Certainly, a code of realism grew up very rapidly. A Dublin

poster for the first screenings of the Lumière films in 1896 proclaims that their images are 'so realistic that for the moment one is almost apt to forget that the representation is artificial.' During the next sixty years, the primary aim of the film industry (apart from making money—or in order to make money) was increased realism (visual and psychological), as the successive developments of film technology indicate: panchromatic film stock replaced orthochromatic because it was sensitive to a wider range of colours through the spectrum—it was more 'realistic'; colour was hailed as an advance in realism, as were sound and wide screen. André Bazin's aesthetic doctrine rested on the virtues of deep focus cinematography, since deep focus, for him, respected the 'integrity' of visual space; and the critical orthodoxy represented by Bazin valued 'realistic' directors such as Murnau and Welles over the montage

school inaugurated by the Soviet directors of the Twenties.⁶

The concomitant of this valuation of 'realistic' cinema is the affirmation of illusionist aesthetics. Films such as Murnau's *Sunrise* (hailed by critics of the time as the greatest film ever made) evince precisely the qualities that Brecht and Eisenstein (and, much later, Godard) reacted against: psychological penetration of character; an organic, closed structure; conservative ethic of hero and heroine reunited through benign fate, or optimism in the final triumph of 'human nature'; a technique of stylistic self-effacement that refuses to interrupt the identificatory propulsion toward catharsis—the use of *trompe l'oeil* backdrops, carefully painted to reassert perspectival laws, and hence reality, emphasises the desire to *hide* technique. Against this, we may contrast Brecht's desire to 'show the machinery, the ropes, and the flies', as does 'a sporting arena during a boxing match', and to make visible the sources of light for that set.⁶ At the root of Brecht's antipathy toward illusionism is his oft-stated opinion that 'Feelings are private and limited. Against that the reason is fairly comprehensive and to be relied on.' From this base, Brecht's formulation of the principles of epic theatre evolved as the simple antithesis of illusionist precepts: the generic focus of epic replaces the individualist focus of most dramatic and lyric art; intellectual activity replaces emotional involvement; the audience becomes the co-creator of the work, rather than its receptacle.

Only in Russia, in the years immediately after the Soviet Revolution, do we find an approach to cinema that matches Brecht's particular rejection of illusionism. And in fact I think it is reasonable to suggest (even if it is speculative, in the absence—in English—of any specific documentation) that Brecht's aesthetic theories were themselves partially formulated as a response to his encounters with the Soviet avant-garde of Meyerhold, Tretiakov, Eisenstein, Vertov, Mayakovsky and others. For in Russia after the Revolution, film was welcomed as a new art outside the perspectival/illusionist tradition; its technological, mechanical base was embraced by the constructivist artists, and film's ability artificially to create a world through montage, rather than through a conventional re-creation of reality, was rapidly grasped. In 1923, for instance, Dziga Vertov published a manifesto in *Lef* bemoaning the lack of 'a single picture . . . directed . . . towards the emancipation of the film camera, which remains wretchedly enslaved, subordinated to the imperfect,

⁶ The fact that this orthodoxy is increasingly falling into disrepute today (i.e. it is difficult now to perceive Murnau and Welles as primarily 'realistic' directors) does not invalidate the point; through the Forties and Fifties what was valued in film was expressed in terms of 'realism'.

⁶ *Brecht on Theatre*. It is interesting to note in parenthesis that one of Eisenstein's first stage productions (*The Mexican*, inspired by Jack London) included a boxing match. Instead of having the fight offstage, in the conventional manner, Eisenstein had his actors learn how to box, and incorporated the boxing match into the text of the performance; the stage became a sporting arena.



Anna Lee and Brian Donlevy in 'Hangmen Also Die', on which Brecht worked in Hollywood with Fritz Lang

undiscerning human eye.' Aware of the dominant presence of a naturalistic aesthetic, Vertov demanded the 'dislocation and concentration of visual phenomena' (analogous, obviously, to Brecht's alienation effect), and proclaimed: 'From today we are liberating the camera, and making it work in the opposite direction, furthest away from copying.'

Vertov was not alone in his radical conception of the cinema's potential. In 1924 Eisenstein made *Strike*, a film which not only demonstrates the seminal influence of Meyerhold and Tretiakov's dramatic theories, their emphasis on the 'how' of artistic expression, but marks the beginnings of a strain of cinema in which naturalism and psychological observation play no part. Brecht's formulation of 'epic' theatre evolved during the late 1920s, and by that time the concept was firmly entrenched in the theatrical and cinematic praxis of a whole constellation of Soviet artists.

The key figure was Meyerhold, whose work consistently prefigures Brecht's by some years. In 1920 he bewailed the fact that 'In the intimate theatres the removal of footlights has still not led to the elimination of bourgeois illusion, because in place of footlights they have bored a keyhole to satisfy the curiosity of prying spectators';⁷ in 1923, his production of Faiko's *Lake Lyul* used advertisement hoardings, lifts and stairs as its sets, besides screens for projected titles. Meyerhold used area lighting to switch the action constantly from one level to another, and handled his scenes in an episodic manner close to the principles of montage that Eisenstein was in the process of evolving. By 1927, the influence of these artists had been sufficient to prompt an editorial in *Novy Lef* that proclaimed: 'We consider that with increased precision of work in art, the epic

will gain ground at the expense of the lyric.'

It was with *October*, on which he began work in 1926, that Eisenstein most clearly demonstrated the potential of cinematic epic. One example of this epic mode in operation: the opening of the bridge. The sequence comes just after demonstrating crowds have been fired upon by the Czarist government's troops; the government orders the bridge to be opened, to cut off the demonstrators' escape. The lessons of the Cubist painters were well appreciated in Russia. Malevich, the Suprematist painter who designed sets for Meyerhold, said that he 'treated space not as illusory, but as cubist,' and Meyerhold himself pronounced 'We shall employ more and more Cubists and Suprematists, and do away completely with the barrier of the footlights.' Thus Eisenstein shoots the opening of the bridge from a wide range of angles, and many of the shots are repeated. Time is stretched out, extended, but not so as to create tension (as it would, for example, in Griffith). The effect is *analytic*, rather than empathetic; the multiplicity of viewpoints precludes simple audience identification; the repetition of shots, and the use of slow motion, deliberately undercuts any tendency toward a purely naturalistic viewing of the event. The repetition establishes an air of critical investigation rather than voyeurism—an investigation of the authority that exercises its power in this inhuman manner. The temporal extension of the scene—like the Odessa Steps massacre in *Battleship Potemkin*—takes it out of time, to the extent that it assumes a kind of exemplary import: the significance of the scene is not limited to its particular locus in this sequence of events, but is a paradigmatic metaphor of the evils that the Revolution finally overcomes.

Other scenes, such as Kerensky's ascension to power, or the earlier interface of trench scenes with gun machinery being lowered by cranes (to 'illustrate' the

oppression of the soldiers by their commanders), or the 'God and Country' sequence (which brilliantly *proves* in visual terms that God does not exist) are instances of Eisenstein's articulation of an epic form at its most ascetic, operating through a dialectical mode of visual argumentation. These sequences are shorn of emotional enticement—unlike the opening of the bridge, where Eisenstein's use of the dead girl's flowing hair and the dangling horse is quite calculated to tug at our heart-strings, at the same time that it trenchantly analyses the situation in more abstractly intellectual terms. This dual focus is not however incompatible with Brecht's own position. 'A considerable sacrifice of the spectator's empathy does not mean sacrificing all right to influence him,' Brecht wrote in 1936, continuing to note that emotional effects 'are deliberate, and have to be controlled.' In sum, then, we may find in *October* an extraordinary parallel to Brecht's own theories of epic theatre.

Whether Brecht's ideas were formed or confirmed through his contact with Eisenstein and his films (they had met when Eisenstein visited Berlin in 1929, and Brecht made specific reference to *Battleship Potemkin* in 1930, in the article written after the *Threepenny Opera* lawsuit), it is difficult to say. In the light of the German work of Heartfield, Grosz, Piscator and other Dadaists who ultimately rallied toward a revolutionary cause, I would suspect that Brecht's encounter with Eisenstein was principally the discovery of a kindred spirit, which underlined the coincidence of parallel endeavours. But cinema certainly had some formative influence on Brecht, who early on adapted to his own plays the silent cinema's interspersed of visual sequences with printed titles.

More specifically, Brecht ardently admired Chaplin's films, as several early essays testify (and he later met Chaplin in Hollywood). Nor was Brecht alone in this; both Eisenstein and Meyerhold wrote on Chaplin's art, and in 1936 Meyerhold noted 'an astonishing resemblance' between the work of Chaplin and Eisenstein. Although Brecht appreciated the elements of social criticism in Chaplin's films, the greater impact was a formal, methodological one: the episodic nature of Chaplin's narratives, and his selection of what Meyerhold praised as his 'monumental subjects'. Writing on *The Gold Rush*, Brecht commended story and theme on the ground that the average theatre would at once reject anything so simple, crude and linear. This was one aspect of Chaplin's influence; the other was his gestural acting style. Writing in 1931, Brecht said: 'As against the dramatic actor, who has his character established from the first and simply exposes it to the inclemencies of the world and the tragedy, the epic actor lets his character grow before the spectator's eyes out of the way in which he behaves. . . The actor Chaplin . . . would in many ways come closer to the epic than to the dramatic theatre's requirements.'

In more general terms, Brecht's fondness for a low life milieu, and his emphasis on the primary role of laughter on the epic stage, may testify to Chaplin's example, and it has

⁷ Meyerhold on Theatre, Ed. and trans., Edward Braun, Hill and Wang, New York, 1969.

been observed that one of the sources for *Puntilla* was *City Lights*.

Historically, however, it is the Russian avant garde of the Twenties that provides the seminal ideological and aesthetic connection with Brecht's work. Note I say 'the avant garde', rather than simply 'Russian art'; the climate of artistic expression in the new Soviet society never settled into anything remotely resembling concord. This avant garde grew out of the Futurist movement, and was in conscious opposition to the predominant tendency of support for a socially conscious realism based on the achievement of the 19th century novel. In 1917, the Bolsheviks were decidedly prejudiced against the Futurists, but the vigour of the avant garde's engagement in social concerns after the October Revolution placated that hostility. It was only a temporary placation, however, as Meyerhold's constant struggle against official suppression of his work suggested.

Thus to propose Brecht's theoretical writing in the Twenties as a model of Marxist aesthetics, or his stage work as montage, would be to encourage critical confusion. Montage, as it is commonly understood (or misunderstood) is capable of embracing equally Eisenstein, Ford, Pudovkin, Milestone. Although Walter Benjamin notes that Brecht's theoretical principles mark a return to those of 'montage', he fails to make explicit the fact that (like many cinematic techniques), montage may be used in both 'illusionary' and 'alienatory' ways—either Ford's 'invisible editing' or Eisenstein's analytic editing. The decisive difference between Eisenstein and his colleague Pudovkin means that the specification 'Russian montage' serves only to conjure up a false image of harmony. Similarly, the designation 'Marxist aesthetics' masks more issues than it clarifies. For there was (and is) no Marxist aesthetics: Marx never formulated one, and what passes for such covers the spectrum of socialist thinking. And even at its highest echelon we must note a decisive split, a split which has reverberated through the last fifty years, whenever the problematic relationship between art and politics has been mooted. This split may be codified by these oppositions: Meyerhold v. Stanislavski; Eisenstein v. Pudovkin; Brecht v. Lukács; Godard v. Truffaut; Makavejev v. Widerberg.

The essential contours of this split may be sketched out through a comparison of the work of Brecht and Lukács, who remain the most influential and accessible exponents of a criticism oriented towards a Marxist commitment.⁸ The cornerstone of Lukács' thought is the concept of 'wholeness'. Like Brecht, he perceives contemporary society (specifically capitalist society) as alienated, fragmented, discordant; like Brecht, he sees the function of art as being to raise (proletarian) consciousness to a point where it may actively intervene in the process of social determination, and thereby attack at the roots of that social alienation. But Lukács believes that the chaos of 'reality' has to be overcome, transcended, in the

work of art, which should present a vision of 'wholeness' and 'unity'. The socialist writer, Lukács maintained, could look forward to a time when alienation will have been conquered, eliminated, and this awareness should be mediated through the writer's presentation of man. Lukács' only concern with the *method* of articulation, artistic technique, was that it should reinforce the 'wholeness' that was the abstract *content* of the work. The function of 'form' is simply to unify the elements, or fragments, of reality that the work contains, to unify them into a totality.

Lukács thus tends to see the work of art as an entity, something complete in itself. Brecht, on the other hand, rejects this concept of 'closure', and with it the idea that the work of art should concern itself with 'wholeness'. Brecht's thrust is towards an open-ended theatrical form which makes contradiction and alienation explicit. He sees the 'closure' of the work of art as itself potentially alienating, in that it perpetuates the distinction between author and audience, producer and consumer (cf. *The Threepenny Opera* lawsuit). By developing open-ended forms, and attacking the illusionist tradition, Brecht actively worked towards creative participation by the audience: they ceased to be spectators 'consuming' art (as they still are in Lukács' aesthetic), and became an integral and necessary part of the production of the work. Thus matters of 'form' and 'technique' assume much greater importance for Brecht than for Lukács; implicit in Brecht's theory and practice is the notion that a work of art could only be politically revolutionary if it was technically revolutionary also.

These two responses—what one might term the 'avant garde' and 'conservative' variants of leftist criticism—to the recognition of 'alienation' in its various manifestations (social, economic, psychological) seem to me to form the main prongs of politically committed art. And, historically, there is little doubt as to which has met with greater acceptance: the years between 1926 and 1940 in Russia proved to be years of persecution for the most excitingly radical artists of the new society. Eisenstein's great work, *October*, was contemptuously dismissed by 'official' critics, who accused him of 'massive subjectivism' and 'quixotic digressions'. Gradually the constructivist principles—the desire to create a functional art—were warped and simplified by government heads, to the point where 'functional art' became synonymous with 'realism': only images of 'real people' (the actual proletariat) doing 'real-life things' can be functional. The kind of abstract intellectual argumentation through visual images that Eisenstein became preoccupied with, was perceived as idiosyncratic and individualist; hence unacceptable.

The reaction against Eisenstein in the late Twenties hardened into suppression in the Thirties; he was virtually barred from making films, at one point was forced publicly to denounce his work. Mayakovsky took refuge in suicide in 1930; Tretiakov was arrested in 1937, and killed shortly thereafter in one of Stalin's purges; Meyerhold's fate was to be the same. Lecturing in 1936, he bewailed the fact that 'the celebrated formulae which were once

flaunted by Eisenstein are rooted in profound principles but, as far as I can see, forgotten.' For 'forgotten' read 'suppressed': a year later an article in the newspaper *Izvestiya* read: 'Meyerhold completely refused to admit that he had encouraged sycophancy and suppressed criticism, and that his false political and artistic policies had led his theatre to total disaster.'

His theatre was closed for the last time a few months later, and Meyerhold himself arrested; he is believed to have been shot in a Moscow prison in February 1940. From that time until the late 1950s, every trace of his name was eradicated from official histories of Soviet theatre, and his writings secreted in vaults. In short, a whole tradition of artistic investigation was effectively crushed by Stalin in the Thirties (only Vertov lived through to the Fifties, and he lost his freedom to work in 1937). And it is at this point that we can finally assess the crucial significance of Brecht's writings: it is through him that the line of thought first developed by certain Russian artists was continued, kept alive, until its recent, radical reformulation in the work of the European cinematic avant garde.

Obviously the influence of Eisenstein has *always* been a seminal one for film-makers conscious of cinematic traditions; but it is doubtful whether this influence has always been for the right reasons. One indication is the orthodox preference for *Battleship Potemkin* over *October*. Not only is the former film more assimilable into critical assessments that value 'organic unity' over 'open-endedness', but its visual authenticity led to its valuation as one inspiration of Grierson's documentary school—the English-speaking world's version of the 'new objectivity' that almost made 'misery itself an object of pleasure.' The inaccessibility of the theoretical texts of *Lef* and *Novy Lef* that could act as a corrective to this estimation of Eisenstein's work, and the systematic obliteration of references to Meyerhold and others, has made films like *October* seem like isolated warts on an otherwise unblemished proletarian cinema-scope.

Until very recently, it was only through Brecht's writing that the trenchant critical edge of this particular brand of aesthetic enquiry could be perceived with conceptual clarity. This is not, of course, to suggest that Brecht's principal achievement is as a transmitter (or populariser) of certain ideas generated by the Russian avant garde. The cast of his mind was not derivative, the quality of his thought never second-hand. Rather, our current rediscovery of the experimental activities taking place in Russia in the Twenties serves to highlight Brecht's position as not that of an isolated genius of the European avant garde, but as the brilliant representative of a wiry strand of aesthetic history. And it is within this theorising perspective that Brecht's influence on the contemporary European cinema is incalculable. Without him, it is doubtful whether Godard, Makavejev, Straub, to mention only the most luminous figures of the radical cinematic avant garde of today, could have produced the body of work that they have. ■

⁸ For a fuller exploration of this issue (to which I am also indebted here), see *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* No. 4 (Spring 1973), the University of Birmingham.



FESTIVALS 74



Szabó's '25 Fireman's Street' (Locarno); Wenders' 'Alice in the Cities' (Berlin)

Berlin

No need at this stage to elaborate on the general poverty of this year's Berlin Festival—disappointments from famous names in both the competition and the Young Forum produced an atmosphere as grey as the skies, and prompted a question which might well be taken up in debate next year: why is the Left seemingly so short of film-making talent? The Young Forum's otherwise lively selection of films from earlier festivals, intermingled with some new catches, offered too many dour examinations of factory and home life; and new films by Sjöman, the Finnish Mollberg and the Chilean Miguel Littin, though full of good intentions, floundered under the weight of heavy narrative techniques and over-insistent close-ups. The Berlin public added its own weird commentary: who would have thought that Norman McLaren's abstract shorts

(accompanying the excellent Lilian Harvey and Jacques Feyder retrospectives) would move a prosperous-looking audience to booing and stamping, or that the youngsters who flocked to see a reputedly blue film, Borowczyk's **Immoral Tales** (now shorn of its debatable Beauty and the Beast episode), would have responded with embarrassed giggles to its often bizarre and beautiful depiction of erotic pleasures and the evils of religious hypocrisy.

Perhaps Berlin's main achievement was to reveal the progress of the young Iranian director Sohrab Shahid Sales, with **A Simple Event** (reviewed from last year's Tehran Festival) in the Forum and **Still Life** in competition. The new film continues his preoccupation with the lives of inarticulate people—in this case, an elderly railway signaller who receives news of his retirement with utter incomprehension—developed through lengthy scenes in which

the characters are simply observed going about their daily chores. Without Sales' extraordinary control, the result could be intolerable, but for me the film's exact placing and timing of shots, rather like a slow symphony scored pianissimo throughout, was entirely hypnotic. Filming in very muted colour and using a sparse, Bresson-like soundtrack of distant voices and train noises, Sales draws us into the lives of this old man and his wife with meticulous set-ups which alter very slightly as each ritual of eating, sleeping and preparing for the day is repeated. When the wife threads a needle, the shot is held until she does it, and because the camera viewpoint is so revealing, it becomes a moment of high tension and meaning. Perhaps a little too hermetic and calculated at times, since the director was clearly imposing a pattern of movement and behaviour on the players, the film nevertheless spoke out with a kind of creative fervour lacking elsewhere in the competition. Although it won several awards, the Jury might have dared public disapproval and given it the Golden Bear, awarded instead to Ted Kotcheff's overheated and facile **Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz**.

From the annual survey of new German films presented by the Forum, the most pleasant discovery was Wim Wenders' **Alice in the Cities**. Because of its plot—German photo-reporter gets landed with young girl in America and sets out to find her grandmother somewhere in Germany—Wenders' film will inevitably be compared with *Paper Moon*. Yet it soon takes off in a different direction, as the rather disconnected but basically likeable hero says goodbye to car and employer with a click of his Polaroid and finds that he is slowly giving more of himself to the chirpy, resilient little creature by his side. A classical narrative drive and Wenders' sure sense of place make the odyssey totally gripping; through his eyes the overhead railway at Wuppertal takes on a science fiction aspect, and the many confrontations between man and girl—like the café scene with both sitting, droopy and silent, pondering the next move—have a splendid, dry resonance. At the end, as they prepare to part, he reads of the death of John Ford, and the camera wings up to reveal a vast, open landscape with their train far below.

The new Fassbinder, **Effie Briest**, is more of a problem. From the very beginning it seems to proclaim itself as filmed literature, and one is faced with continuous talk and voice-over extracts from Fontane's classic. At first, it seems to work, with exquisite black-and-white photography echoing the words—an elaborate track through a forest following mother and daughter, a quiet assignation on a beach—and then one begins to be disturbed by a stasis in character development. Fontane's Effie Briest is a kind of Madame Bovary, seeking escape from a stuffy bourgeois world; but Hanna Schygulla, elegant though she is, never appears capable of setting even a party alight. Too much reverence for the original, or is Fassbinder now embarking on a hazardous attempt to embrace both Straub and Sirk, with the low, monotonous delivery suggesting the former and the over-mannered use of mirrors echoing the latter?

Three small-scale films from new directors

deserve more comment than they received. The Indian **Ankur** (by Shyam Benegal) examines caste differences and social customs in a village setting, employing an elegant *mise en scène*, excellent colour and a lush background of forest and fields to pinpoint the personal passions. An impressive new actress, Shabana Azmi, must surely be employed later by Ray. A Greek film, **The Engagement of Anna**, took a sunny garden setting and a bourgeois family faced with the coming engagement of their apparently docile servant, and without raising its voice hinted at all kinds of repressions and deprivations within Greek society. It was announced at the Festival that its director, Pantelis Voulgaris, had since been imprisoned on an unspecified charge. One of the many French debuts this year, **L'Horloger de St. Paul** by the critic Bertrand Tavernier, examines another enclosed society—this time in Lyon—and shows how a murder investigation affects the relationship between father and son. A little too bland at times, it benefits hugely from Philippe Noiret's performance and suggests a likeable talent.

But the only real festive atmosphere this year was to be found in the crowded little cinema up the Kurfürstendamm showing the Harvey and Feyder films. Each one of the Harveys was a discovery, so arranged as to reveal her progress from a bubbly silent comedienne through the rather strained soubrette of *Congress Dances* to the sophisticated actress of the later 1930s comedies. These qualities first really come together in *Ein Blonder Traum* (1932), a delightful romantic fantasy with Willy Fritsch and Willi Forst, about a young girl bent on getting to Hollywood; she only makes it in a dream sequence audition, culminating with the dream director shooting her with the camera. Director Paul Martin clearly learned much from Clair and Lubitsch; but as we saw more of his work he emerged as a talent in his own right.

Glückskinder and *Seven Slaps* also uncovered a distinctive writing talent in Curt Goetz, whose snappy, punning dialogue brought the films close to American 1930s comedies—in fact, Goetz was a kind of German Preston Sturges. Harvey is at her most engaging in both, pouting like Carole Lombard and reacting to the many startling plot twists with a fine defiance. But the real surprise was *Capriccio* (1938), which turned out to be her last important film—an extraordinary farrago of Charley's Aunt impersonations, wicked operatic parodies (much of the film is in recitative) and one dance number worthy of Minnelli. The whole thing has a kind of all-out German grossness, especially in the sexual innuendoes, which makes a virtue out of bad taste (the director, Karl Ritter, also made some heavy propaganda pieces). With the Martin pictures, *Capriccio* offered irrefutable evidence of the immense technical flair and craftsmanship to be found in German studios of the time. And I suspect we have only seen the tip of the iceberg.

The Feyder shows necessarily offered fewer revelations, although we did see the rich and rare *Pension Mimosas* (1934), with a marvellous part for Françoise Rosay trying to reform a young ne'er-do-well, and a quirky early serial, *Le Pied qui étireint* (1916), which ended surrealistically with the villain

exposed as an actor playing Charlie Chaplin whose wedding celebrations are attended by Musidora, in vampire cloak, and other Feuillade celebrities.

The Young Forum also came up with two Russian discoveries, Dovzhenko's *Zvenigora* (quite well known here) and *Alone* (1931) by Kozintsev and Trauberg. Virtually a silent film, with a little added dialogue and a soundtrack combining effects with a rich and strange Shostakovich score, *Alone* creates its own poetry from the brooding Siberian landscapes where its teacher-heroine is forced to cope with superstition and corruption. Shostakovich's skeletal writing, with its high and low woodwinds, strained the early Soviet sound system almost to breaking point, but its beauty comes through regardless—a treasure trove for musicologists as well as film buffs. Indeed, the past won hands down over the present at Berlin this year.

JOHN GILLET

Locarno

With Karlovy Vary muffled by red tape and Venice as off-on-off as an Italian government, Locarno now bids to join Cannes and Berlin as one of the triumvirate of major European festivals. Now in its twenty-seventh year, it has gradually outstripped its rivals and emerged, in step with the new Swiss cinema, as a front-runner in its own right. As a place, Locarno has an identity problem. Ask a question, and the reply is likely to come in a mixture of Italian, French and German. This fragmentation was echoed in the films, as it has been at most festivals in the last few years. And as so often, the most adventurous work came not from emergent national cinemas (a Syrian film, well reported in advance, turned out to be an indifferently shot piece of neo-realism) but from the old hands, film-makers whose technique is neither encumbrance nor advertisement but indissoluble from their style. Fresh from Cannes came Rivette's *Céline et Julie* (discussed elsewhere in this issue) and the refined, rich austerity of Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac*. And from Italian

television there was Ermanno Olmi's **The Circumstance**, his best film since *One Fine Day* and one which blew a breath of fresh air through the fog of so much international obscurantism.

Olmi's film is constructed out of loose ends, barely held together by the disintegrating nucleus of a family. Hovering round the centre, since this is a northern Italian middle-class family, is the mother, a career woman inadequately coming to terms with the painful realisation that her domestic universe has splintered. Olmi conveys this disintegration by constantly shifting between the different members of the family. Their paths cross as one scene overlaps another, but there is no shared direction and no known destination. Father, a business executive whisked away by his company's dynamic new bosses to a management reorganisation conference, is preoccupied with the survival of his job and his pride. The two sons have gone their own way, one to the simple life with his wife on the family farm, the other withdrawn into the inanimate intricacies of electronic games. The teenage daughter is discovering the mysteries of sex. The catalyst, for the second time in an Olmi film, is a road accident witnessed by the mother; and with no point of contact with her immediate world, she reaches out for a safety valve, an obsessive interest in the accident victim.

It is a temporary relief, since the injured boy is eventually removed from hospital by his parents. The mother is on her own again, as the film ends with the family briefly together again on the way to drifting further apart. The circumstance, the road accident, has been no more than something which happened during the summer. Olmi's method reflects his subject—a driving, aggressive, elliptical narrative line which splits into as many directions as there are members of the family. For the modern family, contact is at the end of a telephone line: succinctly, the film begins with a telephone call and ends with one of the sons driving along the road away from home. For Olmi too this is a change of direction. His characters are observed not with the affection of his earlier films but from a neutral

'Still Life', directed by Sohrab Shahid Sales





'Un Homme qui Dort': Jacques Spiesser

distance. But also not without sympathy; this is not so much a critique of the institution of the family as a case-history, and the diagnosis is gloomy but realistic. The death of the family, Olmi seems to be suggesting, is both inevitable and painful.

In the margin of Olmi's film is the theme of the death of emotion. Maurice Pialat's **La Gueule Ouverte**, which is about a family death, has this theme at its centre. A woman is dying of cancer, and her family don't want to know. Her husband seeks distraction in drink, as he has always done, and in harmless fantasies about other women; her feckless son and his wife drift in and out, waiting for the end. Life comes to terms with death, which clouds every banality of family living but can only incidentally impinge. This is a bleak and inevitably depressing film in which even the setting—a small town in the Auvergne—seems to match the mood. But as in his earlier *L'Enfance Nue*, Pialat's quiet, self-

effacing style gets right under the skin of his characters, minutely revealing how the process of dying excludes emotion until the actual death releases the bonds of discretion.

There was precious little discretion in a Norwegian film, **His Mother's House**, which kept threatening, and finally delivered, an act of incest. The participants are a disillusioned student and his widowed mother, a lonely lady much given to moody mooning about the house. Outside is the cold of a Norwegian winter; inside all is warm and welcoming, and one thing naturally leads to another. Given that the steamy finale is implicit in the steady progression from son fondling his mother's clothes to mother fondling her breasts in front of a mirror, Per Blom's methodical direction does generate an appropriate atmosphere of claustrophobia and repressed lust. But it was bringing Ibsen up to date with a vengeance when the son raced home from the news of his girlfriend's pregnancy to

seek solace in his mother's bed.

Sexual frolics of a more varied kind were on display in Rauni Mollberg's **Earth is a Sinful Song**, a heady saga of life in the far north of Finland. Here again the tone is set from the outset, as a buxom farmer's daughter noisily milks a cow and another cow bloodily miscarries in relentless close-up. Mollberg discovered a Hogarthian gallery of grotesques in his frozen wilderness, and by the look of it they all had a riotous time acting out the local customs. The story, which centres round a girl's frowned-on love for a passing Lapp reindeer herdsman, runs the gamut from murder through religious frenzy to flagellation in the sauna; incest is a mere incidental. Impressively shot (in those temperatures it must have been a labour of love), the film has a certain earthy conviction. The only doubt is whether life in the ice is quite so action-packed.

Also set in the snows, in the mountains of Khirghiz, was the Russian Tolomuch Okcev's **The Ferocious One**, an artless story of an orphan boy who befriends a wolf cub and learns the hard way that a wild animal must eventually return to its own kind. Overtly sentimental, and often no more than Disney with a Russian accent, this was a simple morality tale given an occasional political flavour (the revolution is nigh) in its secondary conflict between the mountain peasants and the local overlord. The scenery is magnificent, and provides some distraction from the too frequent presence of the boy's grandmother, a repository of peasant proverbial wisdom.

A location can sometimes bolster a slender plot. Or, as in the Canadian **Montreal Main**, it can be central. The Main area of Montreal, a sleazy conjunction of neon lights, pinball parlours and crumbling apartment blocks, is the setting for Frank Vitale's evidently autobiographical story of a man's involvement with a teenage boy. As a study of loneliness—the man is cut off from his closest friend by the friend's aggressive relationship with a girl whom he single-mindedly pursues and then just as single-mindedly discards—the film is casually structured and diffuse, only really getting into focus with the development of the friendship, always teetering on the edge of sexual involvement, between the man and the boy. But the hesitant, slightly stilted tone of the dialogue has a persuasive ring of genuine improvisation.

The American entry was insignificant: Bogdanovich's wholly miscalculated shot at **Daisy Miller**, and John Berry's **Claudine**, which has Diahann Carroll as an unlikely Harlem mother of six who takes up with James Earl Jones' equally unlikely garbage collector. Britain had **A Bigger Splash**, also seen at Cannes, and a reputation for having been uncooperative at the selection stage (Jack Hazan's film was worth its place, but was there no other film to keep it company?). On home ground a clutch of Swiss films was disappointing. Even Alain Tanner's **Le Milieu du Monde**, shown on the day I left, was by all reports a story of promise unfulfilled. An Indian film, **27 Down Bombay-Varanasi Express**, made enterprising use of its locations of Bombay and Benares in its flashback biography of a railway worker drifting between his arranged marriage and an emancipated girl he meets

'La Gueule Ouverte': Monique Mélinand, Philippe Léotard, Hubert Deschamps



on a train. Overlong and on occasion technically stilted, it nevertheless revealed a promising new director in Awtar Krishna Kaul—a promise tragically cut short in a drowning accident three weeks before the festival.

The main prize went, deservedly, to István Szabó's **25 Fireman's Street**, a dense, fragmented history of a Budapest apartment building, reflected through the dreams and memories of its residents on the night before its demolition. Meshing fantasy and memory, and switching (disconcertingly at first, until the pattern emerges in the patchwork of images) from one resident to another, Szabó builds an intricate jigsaw out of the aspirations and disappointments of several generations of people marked by their tiny place in the cruel history of Hungary during the last sixty years. It is a difficult film, unsettling in its constant shifts in time and between characters (ghosts of the past visiting the anxious dreams of the present); but it is also a film whose very complexity is in the end its own reward.

No festival is complete nowadays without a new film from Fassbinder. **Martha** is another bow to Sirk (with a nod in passing to *Gaslight*), a brooding, richly decorated melodrama about a woman's masochistic devotion to a husband (Karl Böhm, as disturbingly ice-eyed as he was in *Peeping Tom*) who imprisons her in the house simply by the menace of his fastidious authority. As before, Fassbinder's anti-dramatic style, and an episodic structure where mood rather than narrative is the dominant key, builds a suffocating sense of old-fashioned involvement. A film about the traps sprung by auto-suggestion, it ends with a devastating metaphor of incarceration: the woman, injured in a car crash when she hysterically flees from the house, is collected from hospital in a wheelchair, now physically as well as psychologically the servant of her master.

DAVID WILSON

Edinburgh

That archetype of alienated twentieth-century man, Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, stalked the 28th Edinburgh Film Festival in more than one guise. Fred Haines, writer/director of a kind of multi-media, multinational version of Hesse's novel, is wary of 'the cultist view that *Steppenwolf* is a book to live by'; but this concern has done little to restrain the trippy, psychedelic aspects of his meditation on the divided nature of man—a whizz-bang display of technological gimmickry (a subject Hesse treated with some scorn) which is held up before the hero as a mirror to a multifarious universe and his own multifarious personality.

Steppenwolf is only the showiest, and by no means the worst, example of a type of movie which has pulled together a number of the other categories at Edinburgh this year—the New German Cinema, the American independents, the developing cinemas of countries only lately added to the movie map, even what was once called the 'talking head' picture. Singly, in pairs, or in various sizes of ménage, the people on the Edinburgh screen engaged in a troubled dialogue on the identity-communication-alienation syndrome.



'Dark Star': Dan O'Bannon (back to camera) talks to the dead commander of the spaceship

The philosophic background to this trend actually emerges more coherently from a French film, *Un Homme qui dort*, than it does from *Steppenwolf*. Max von Sydow (arguably the one actor capable of bringing Hesse's philosophic emblem to life) is a solid centre in Haines' adaptation, but he is cast adrift by the way the director has cheated on his text. Faced with the task of transferring the author's clotted discourse to the screen, Haines has responded by lopping out a good half of it and covering this operation with a phosphorescent smoke-screen of 2001 effects. The lesson that Harry Haller now learns in the Magic Theatre is to ease the pain of life by simply becoming a hedonist; and as he floats away in cruciform pose at the end, tentatively following instructions to 'apprehend the humour of life, its gallows-humour,' his image is replaced by a swelling close-up of Dominique Sanda—the strangely soft-focused attention given throughout to her role as guide and mentor finally revealed as an attempt to ease the dull ache of Hesse's metaphysics by bringing up the love interest.

Bernard Queysanne's *Un Homme qui dort* is almost all text. The film is without dialogue and its images might be a graceful flow of photos, illustrative of the voice-over, prose-poem narration but paced to catch the rhythm of a slow damming of the processes of life. Its hero is a post-*Steppenwolf* outsider, as portrayed by Camus and anthologised by Colin Wilson. A young student suddenly drops out, not only from his classes but from the whole contaminating business of participation in life. He becomes 'a drifter, a sleepwalker, a clam,' wanting only to have life wash through him, without trace or residue. At length, he sees through his delusion that isolation will render him 'impenetrable' to the world; is oppressed by the silent otherness of people, 'as if you, the loner, had been assaulted by all the other loners' (the film slips into harsh, grainy tones and slippery monochrome blotches to convey a vision of the 'other'—the 'cats,

rats, and freaks'—as gruesome and compelling as the world of Frans Zwartjes); and finally learns 'nothing, except that solitude teaches nothing.' A precise, hallucinatory description of the moods of anomie, *Un Homme* is not without its problems—the English translation and delivery of the commentary, for instance, or the physical aspect of Jacques Spiesser, too bovine for the hero's disengagement to appear to be much more than inertia.

Other movies transmute existential philosophy into encounter group situations, and fare less well at subordinating visuals to chat. Rudolph Thome's *Made in Germany and U.S.A.* follows the collapse of a marriage through discussions that proceed in ever tightening circles round the complainants' vague points of grievance, while the action expands to take in a whole new continent and a further group of friends blessed to be witness to this epic dissolution. The Canadian *The Only Thing You Know* is less dishonest but equally inept in the three-way relationship it sets up and then picks apart; there is much heavy breathing over non-communication and a facile attempt to pretend to be cinéma-vérité with awkward 'improvised' dialogue and pell-mell camerawork. Even Stephen Dwoskin's *Behindert*, an account of how the relationship between Dwoskin and German actress Carola Regnier broke up because of the difficulties caused by the physical disability which forces Dwoskin to wear leg braces and use crutches, seems too self-involved to be clear-sighted. Dwoskin generously gives Ms. Regnier nearly all the screen time, studying their situation as reflected in the nervousness and increasing irritability with which she talks, smiles and gestures in long, long takes. But for all the film-maker's abundant sympathy for the way the lady copes with what seem to be hardly overwhelming problems, he achieves little beyond a portrait of her self-pity.

A *Steppenwolf* from movieland itself,



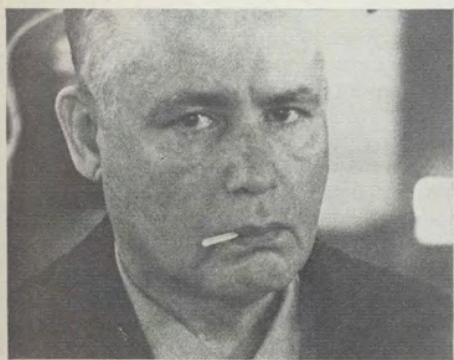
THE FILMS OF
FREDERICK WISEMAN



AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS

Thomas R. Atkins

The first image is a far shot of the downtown district of an American city. Then we see a three-story building with a sign reading 'Juvenile Court 616'. A squad car turns into the parking lot and as it stops we see on the door 'Police City of Memphis'. Inside the court building handcuffs are unlocked from a young boy's wrists. Another boy says on the telephone, 'If you love me, you want to come up here and get me out 'cause I ain't done nothing.' As a policeman leads him to a chair in a waiting area, a small kid pleads, 'I don't want to go, I don't want to go.' An officer inspects a lethal-looking blade taken from a youth. A girl arrested for shoplifting listens impassively while a Lieutenant explains her legal rights. A seemingly endless stream of young people, black and white, of all sizes and ages, with parents and alone, are waiting to be processed—frisked, photographed, interrogated, psychologically tested and eventually brought to trial. During the holding period before trial they pass the time by watching television and exercising in a yard. Their record cards are placed in long revolving trays containing thousands of court files on young lawbreakers.



Right and right top: 'High School'; top and centre: 'Juvenile Court'; bottom: 'Hospital'

This is the opening of Frederick Wiseman's *Juvenile Court*, the seventh film that he has produced, directed and edited for his remarkable American institution series. All his films start in a similar fashion—with a rapid flow of brief images and sequences, almost a montage effect, that immediately immerses the viewer, without comment or explanation, into the complex, troublesome reality of various contemporary institutions in a supposedly democratic society. Since 1967 he has taken us inside a prison for the criminally insane, a middle-class high school, a metropolitan police department and a hospital, an Army training centre, a monastery and a juvenile court. Aside from getting permission to film, Wiseman usually does little advance research beyond making sure that his subject is 'a reasonably good or even superior institution of its kind and not a sitting duck.' Because his audience is largely unfamiliar with the daily workings of the institution, and because he is often surprised by what he and his cameraman William Brayne find with their lightweight 16mm equipment, Wiseman has called the making of his films 'a voyage of discovery'.

For *Juvenile Court* Wiseman and Brayne spent over a month in Memphis, Tennessee, where they shot more than sixty hours or about 125,000 feet of black and white film. Then, in his headquarters in a warehouse building overlooking Boston harbour, Wiseman edited the footage to 144 minutes. In the cutting he is trying not to simplify the material or to distort it to fit an abstract ideological 'truth'; instead he works to create a film reflecting the complicated and ambiguous actuality that he encountered during the filming in order to make it a true 'discovery' experience for the audience. The editing, he has said, is not so much a totally rational procedure as 'a process of dreaming', involving a long period of responding intuitively and imaginatively to the vast amount of footage until the relationships between the disparate events and persons emerge into a unified, coherent but still unresolved form.

In contrast to documentaries like *Salesman* or *An American Family*, Wiseman's films do not concentrate on a few individuals or stories; they have no leading characters or narrative in the conventional sense. What Wiseman gives us in *Juvenile Court* and his other films is an enormous cast, people of all ages, shapes and colours, some appearing only once, others recurring many times, all playing their parts in a brilliantly selected mosaic of activities and episodes, relationships and conflicts, that gradually reveals an overall pattern of behaviour illuminating the morality both of the institution and of the society that created it.

Wiseman does not tell his viewer how to interpret the pattern. Although his films are obviously the products of a strong viewpoint, he makes no editorial statement either directly through narration or indirectly through the interview technique, nor does he use music to manipulate the spectator's feelings. This absence of explanatory devices, plus his avoidance of more popular (and profitable) subjects, may help account for the fact that some of his films have a reputation for being difficult to understand. Actually his purpose, as he has explained, is to deepen the spectator's involvement in the material by making his films so 'there's

no separation between the audience watching the film and the events in the film. It's like the business of getting rid of the proscenium arch in the theatre, and, by analogy, narration is the proscenium arch because it immediately separates you from the experience of what you're going to see and hear, by telling you that it has nothing to do with you or by telling you what to think about it.' The viewer, in short, is asked to be far more than a passive witness; he must become an active participant, working out his own meaning and deciding for himself how to relate to the events occurring on the screen.

A major difference between Wiseman and nearly every other American film-maker today is that he is an artist capable of exercising a multiple consciousness—of seeing life from his own personal perspective while at the same time being objective enough to allow, even to encourage, other opposing perspectives. This quality is apparent not only in the variety of situations and characters he uses but in his ability to get inside numerous different roles simultaneously—particularly in a film like *Juvenile Court*, where, for instance, he shows us the problems of the court system from the vantage of the judge, the lawyers, the social workers, the parents, as well as that of the accused.

In one of the film's most disturbing cases we watch a psychologist question a thoughtful 15-year-old boy accused of sexually molesting a small girl while baby-sitting. The boy calls the charges 'all a lot of bunk'. In the juvenile court judge's chamber we meet the girl's mother, an extremely nervous, sexually obsessed individual, who describes how her two children told her about the boy's behaviour. When the judge talks to the defendant, reminding him of the seriousness of the allegations, the boy agrees to take a lie detector test. The attorneys and various counsellors speculate with the judge about the possibility that the mother, who had warned the boy in advance about her distrust of male baby-sitters, might have had a similar event in her own childhood and consequently may be exaggerating or even imagining the charges. We do not hear the results of the lie detector test, which would not have been conclusive anyway. The characters have spoken for themselves, and each viewer can have his own reaction, make his own judgment according to his particular prejudices and values. The implications of the legal issues and human attitudes extend far beyond the innocence or guilt of this specific defendant, raising tough questions about the system of juvenile justice as well as the condition of society in general.

This multiple view, the painstakingly balanced portrait of numerous sides of a situation, is typical of all Wiseman's work; even his first film *Titicut Follies*, made in 1967, which contains one of the strongest condemnations of an institution and its governing officials. The condemnation, of course, is implicit in the existing material and not the result of editorialising or manipulation by the director. A practising and teaching lawyer before he moved into film-making, Wiseman got the idea for the film while taking his law classes on visits to the Bridgewater, Massachusetts, State Hos-

pital for the Criminally Insane. The film, which takes its title from an annual revue staged by the hospital staff and 'patients', is the only American documentary ever to be officially barred from general public showing by order of a United States court. Although *Titicut Follies* was made with their permission, the Bridgewater officials and the state attorney general changed their minds when it received negative reactions from some state legislators and in the press. The attorney general decided to take legal action against the film, and in the subsequent trial *Titicut Follies* was banned from public screenings in the state on the grounds that it represented a breach of contract and that it had violated an inmate's privacy.

Wiseman has commented, 'There was no evidence introduced at the trial that the film was not an honest portrayal of the conditions. There is some question about whether the inmates had any privacy to begin with. If [then state attorney general Elliot] Richardson and the other politicians in Massachusetts were genuinely concerned about the privacy and dignity of the inmates of Bridgewater, they would not have allowed the conditions that are shown in the film to exist. They were more concerned about the film and its effect on their reputations than they were about Bridgewater.' Later, when the case was appealed, the Massachusetts Civil Liberties Union opposed the film. Recently CLUM has reversed its original position, but *Titicut Follies* remains under court restriction in the state.

It is ironic that Wiseman should be accused of ignoring the privacy of his subjects, for it would be difficult to find another contemporary director more aware of the legal issues involved in the matter of the individual's right to privacy and the public's right to be informed about tax-supported institutions, or one who has paid such close attention to the plights of forgotten people—criminals, mental patients, the poor—often buried in state institutions. A dominant concern throughout his series is the individual's attempt to preserve his humanity while struggling against laws and systems that often seem to have a dehumanising effect. Sometimes the degrading process is obvious, as when the Bridgewater inmate in *Titicut Follies* complains to the staff that the place is driving him mad; but usually, as in Wiseman's next film *High School*, the process is more subtle and nearly invisible to the participants.

Although some critics have thought that *Titicut Follies* and *High School* are more straightforward indictments or simple exposés than the later films, Wiseman believes that his approach in all his films has been basically the same. *Titicut Follies* may appear one-sided at first largely because most viewers are almost totally unfamiliar with the subject; but Wiseman has carefully presented the differing arguments about Bridgewater. *High School* is also more complex than it may seem on first viewing. The film's point of view is enlarged by showing—through the parents—that the school's ideology is actually an expression of the goals of the surrounding community. Neither film merely indicts or judges one institution, but uses it to isolate and exemplify broader issues.

In a key sequence in *High School*, which was shot in 1968 at a large, chiefly white and middle-class school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the dean of discipline says to a student, 'We are out to establish that you can be a man and that you can take orders.' This message is reiterated in nearly every student-faculty encounter shown in the film and reinforced by every conference between school administrators and parents. Self-effacement and blind obedience emerge finally as the practical values, as opposed to the professed ideals, of the American secondary educational system and of the parents whose children are caught in the system.

One of the funniest scenes in *High School* shows a group of girls performing exercises to the tune of 'Simple Simon'. Beneath the humour, of course, is the suggestion that the school, while ostensibly aiming to develop the individual's potential, is actually encouraging its students to be Simple Simons, putting their hands on their heads and clapping their hands in the air in unquestioning acceptance of their teachers' authority. The result, as Wiseman shows us repeatedly in the film, is apathy, depression and waste—the sad waste of human potential in even the best schools.

An obstacle in making an engaging film about high school is that to most Americans the subject is excruciatingly familiar. Wiseman solves this difficulty by concentrating on certain crucial aspects of the high school experience—primarily relationships between students and teachers—and by making the familiar seem unfamiliar again, or rather by reminding us of the essential strangeness of the whole experience. One of his chief methods is to point out and underscore the comic qualities of high school, the ludicrous inflexibility of the system and of the people who run the system. Administrators and instructors become comic figures as they attempt to force their values—about everything ranging from family life and sexuality to dress habits—upon the students, without regard for their actual needs. The main motif of the film, as in traditional comedy, is the effort of the older generation to suppress or restrict the life and spontaneity of the younger generation.

In scene after scene we watch young people playing various roles in special outfits—almost as if they were actors in a play. They wear aprons and play at being cooks; they wear home-made dresses and play at fashion shows; they wear spacesuits and play at being astronauts; and they discuss the importance of wearing tuxedos and formal gowns to dances just like real adults. The girls dress up as drum majorettes and play with rifles, while the football team dresses up as cheerleaders and plays at being girls. None of these costumes or roles is necessarily harmful, of course, but what is damaging is the attitude toward the different roles fostered by the educators and the resulting detachment or boredom on the part of the young participants. The educators do not encourage involvement and self-realisation, and consequently the roles seem more like disguises masking the students' actual identities than fulfilling activities offering possibilities of self-discovery.

The goals of the extracurricular games



Wiseman's America. 'Law and Order' (vice squad officer and prostitute, and cops with hit and run offender); 'Hospital'; 'Basic Training'

they are all playing are self-effacement and obedience once again, and it goes on in the classroom discussion as well. In the film we watch teachers playing with knowledge, and students talking about unions and employees, poverty in America and Martin Luther King's assassination, with the same

detachment that they memorise musical notes on the blackboard. Connections are seldom made between the ideas discussed in the classroom and the realities of the world in which the students live—chiefly because no connections are intended by most of the educators. Making such connections in the classroom—say, the relationship between the problems of union members and students—might be threatening to the security of the system.

Early in *High School* we hear a teacher discussing cause and effect with his students. The end of the film shows the ultimate effect of the system, its methods and values. In a faculty meeting the principal reads a letter from a former student who writes that he is about to be dropped behind the DMZ in Vietnam and wishes to leave his G.I. insurance to the school in the event of his death. The principal praises the letter as an example of the success of the school. Indeed it is, for the attitude expressed in the letter is totally submissive. Here is one version of the final role and costume that students—the males at least—are expected to wear and a perfect version of complete self-effacement: meek acceptance of death behind enemy lines. In the letter the young man aptly describes himself as 'only a body doing a job'.

Basic Training, which Wiseman filmed in 1970 at a U.S. Army training centre in Fort Knox, Kentucky, provides an excellent follow-up or sequel to *High School*, for both are about the nurturing of a mentality that accepts regimentation and conformity as normal. In each film we see young people being trained to become obedient bodies in service of society. Even the methods of training in the films are basically the same—fear and humiliation. The rebels and misfits are punished or discarded; the ones who 'go along with it' are praised and rewarded at graduation.

One of the misfits in *Basic Training* is a skinny young man named Hickman who is almost comic in his inability to keep in step during drill practice. 'You're going to have to think about what you're doing, Hickman,' says the drill officer, 'or you're not going to make it.' We have seen the stock figure of the awkward private in countless movies about Army life, but Wiseman does not allow him to remain a stereotype. The next time we see Hickman we learn that he has taken an overdose of sleeping pills. The First Sergeant discusses his case on the phone with the Chaplain, describing him as having 'suicidal tendencies. . . Seems like he wants to knock himself off.'

Hickman is then sent to the Chaplain, a black man with a perpetually cheerful face and a ready answer for every difficulty. When Hickman tells him that the other soldiers are harassing him and that he feels 'a little depressed today', the Chaplain responds, 'That doesn't sound like a man who is really trying to get to the top.' Although the Chaplain invites Hickman to drop in his office any time he feels depressed, it is obvious that he does not wish to deal with Hickman as an individual nor try to understand the personal problems that drove him to near suicide. 'I don't care how good a person is,' says the Chaplain, 'he has those days when he is not as good as he wants to be. . . Stay in the ring and keep struggling. . . fighting.' The Chaplain

has managed to say all the wrong things, and by the end of the session Hickman looks completely lost. He winds up serving as guinea pig in a demonstration of how to take a prisoner from behind and kill by strangling him with his helmet strap and finishing him with a heel stomp. Throughout the demonstration Hickman smiles in embarrassment.

At the opposite extreme from the insecure and sick private is the example of the company commander who has long ago successfully fallen into step. His wife and family are present to witness a ceremony in which he is promoted from First Lieutenant to Captain for '100% efficiency increase' in his work. As he beams with childlike pleasure before his family and superior officers, his mother observes, 'I think he's found his niche in the world.'

In between these extremes of success and failure are the rest of the young men who either accept or quietly resist the military environment, with its lack of women and atmosphere of hostility. Somehow they manage to get through all the discipline and marching, physical hygiene training, weapons and bayonet practices, simulated war games, without attracting too much attention. Their responses range from the private who proudly displays his M-16 A 1 rifle to his visiting relatives, boasting that he can fire 900 rounds in less than a minute, to the black man who defends his behaviour in refusing fire guard by stating simply that he doesn't want any medals: 'I want my life. . . that's my medal.'

Throughout *Basic Training* we see trainees marching together, gradually forming tighter lines, boots stamping more evenly on the pavement, until at the commencement exercise that concludes the film the company passes by the grandstand in perfect order. As the band plays patriotic tunes, many of the officers and families in the grandstand are extremely moved by the spectacle. Because of the way Wiseman has structured his film, our reactions to this 'graduation' are likely to be mixed. He has encouraged us to ask disturbing questions about the orderliness and manliness that are fundamental both to the tradition of basic training and to the American way of life.

While listening to the recipient of the American Spirit of Honor Medal tell his fellows that they must 'take up the banner', we may be reminded of such examples as Hickman who could not cope with the training or the black man who scoffed at heroics because he felt that 'this isn't my country.' Wiseman never allows us to forget the reality behind the parading—that these one-time civilians are training for actual combat where they may have to kill somebody with that 'black licking stick'—as one officer calls the M-16 A 1—and where many of these young men may lose their own lives.

In no other film is Wiseman's concern with presenting a multiple point of view more evident and effective than in *Law and Order*, shot in Kansas City in 1969. The specific subject is the daily routine of the police force, chiefly in the black district with one of the city's highest crime rates; the implied and broader subject is the dilemma of law enforcement in the United

States. In a time of simplistic and hysterical slogans for and against the police, Wiseman has created a work that challenges superficial notions of law and order in society by again encouraging us to view the issue from numerous perspectives.

Although *Law and Order* contains examples of police insensitivity and brutality, Wiseman has no special axe to grind against the police themselves. He does not see police behaviour as the root of the difficulty but as a manifestation of a far deeper and more malignant sickness. The community that pays the police and prescribes the laws that they must enforce is infected with racism and blighted with poverty. At his best the policeman can temporarily ease the problems; at his worst he contributes to them. Yet as nearly every scene in *Law and Order* demonstrates, the police alone cannot cure the fundamental social ills. As Wiseman has said, 'The police are no different from the rest of us.'

The most explosive episode is a night raid in which a member of the vice squad kicks in a tenement basement door and nearly strangles a young black prostitute. 'Don't choke me no more,' she pleads. Another policeman responds, 'He wasn't choking you. You're imagining.' It is too simple-minded an interpretation to blame the excessive cruelty of this event exclusively on the police department. Wiseman does not set up the vice squad member as representative of all policemen, anyway, but as an individual with his own peculiar neurosis who unfortunately happens to be a policeman. Stripped of externals, the scene shows a white male attacking a black female. The man obviously feels hatred for all women, especially those who are black and consequently, in his mind, morally inferior. Society condones his behaviour while leaving the woman defenceless. The fact that the man is a policeman simply permits him to act out, ostensibly in the line of duty, emotions that other citizens must keep hidden or express only indirectly.

Much of the film is occupied with following the police through a series of actions that are, for them, ordinary and routine: locating a stolen purse, caring for a lost child, settling a dispute over a taxi fare. There are humorous moments—or moments in which humour and sadness are mixed, such as a policeman's attempt to remove an old lady's real teeth before taking her to the hospital. What makes most of these scenes so effective is the attention to small details, sudden intimate gestures that may reveal more than larger, more dramatic actions.

Wiseman has said that an important part of *Law and Order* is concerned with 'how the police have to cope with what people do to each other, as opposed to what the police do to people.' Consequently we often see policemen caught in the emotional crossfire of a neighbourhood or family quarrel, and we experience the frustration not only of the police but of all the people involved in the crisis as well. In one of the film's most moving scenes, the police attempt to settle an argument between a young couple who are separated. The wife has taken up with another man, and the husband desperately wants to get his child away from her. The situation, however, cannot be resolved by the police, who can simply make suggestions and try to keep the

peace. 'If you want your child,' the policeman says to the husband, 'you go down and get a lawyer and file for divorce against your wife.' The husband asks, 'What's he doing with my wife?' The policeman can only reply, 'I don't know, and I don't care.' The husband has no job, cannot afford a lawyer and says that he doesn't know what he is going to do now. 'It's ridiculous, sure,' says the policeman, 'but there's nothing we can do about it.'

Just as *Basic Training* extends and develops the concerns of *High School*, the conflicts in *Law and Order* are examined from a different vantage in *Juvenile Court*. *Hospital* shows another kind of professional staff attempting to cope with the consequences of our worst urban ills, while *Essene* explores the difficulties of 'law and order' in a voluntary monastic community. Taken together, Wiseman's films provide an unparalleled cumulative history of certain basic facets of American life in the late sixties and early seventies. While other directors have focused on rock festivals and film stars, Wiseman has chosen to study man's complicated relationship with some of the institutions that reflect his values and shape his life.

The overall impact of Wiseman's film history of America is not particularly comforting, but it is all the more valuable and useful because he has firmly refused to take sides, cast blame, or offer solutions. Over the years he has become increasingly sceptical about any broad legislation or sweeping reform programmes that might solve the problems affecting the institutions. His approach in his films is not to propose or to protest but, in the deepest sense, to inform—to enable the participating viewer to see the problems more clearly.

Juvenile Court, of all the films in the series, may offer Wiseman's most discomfiting and unsettling view of society to date, for it shows men of good will, in an institution regarded as among the best of its kind in the country, searching for humane ways to ease and cure the pains and wounds inflicted by society upon many of its young. Neither strict application of the legal process nor more practical bending of the laws quite seems to work in the more difficult cases, and we are left with the emotion conveyed in one young victim's outcry, 'I feel like I've been trapped. Is there any justice?'

Meanwhile, Frederick Wiseman continues to probe and inform. For his next film, which will premiere in the United States this fall, he went inside a scientific institution—the Yerkes Primate Research Center in Atlanta, Georgia. According to Wiseman, this film is about 'primate research and various experiments done with animals to learn about those centres of the body that control behaviour . . . especially the brain centres controlling sexual and aggressive behaviour.' This new film probably will provoke a wide range of reactions. What is certain is that *Primate* will not be an easy experience but another hard 'voyage of discovery' by the artist who has become, in seven years, one of America's leading film-makers. ■

Most of the quotes from Wiseman used in this article are either from *The Film Journal* (Volume 1, Number 1) or *The Civil Liberties Review* (Winter/Spring 1974).



NIGHT TO DAY



Robert Phillip Kolker

In 1937, Edward Anderson wrote a novel called *Thieves Like Us*. It is set in the depression South and concerns three bank robbers, Bowie, Chicamaw and T-Dub, and the love affair of Bowie and a deprived country girl named Keechie. In 1949, Nicholas Ray made his first feature, *They Live By Night*, based on the Anderson novel. In 1974, Robert Altman released his version of the same novel, under its original title. The formal realisation of the novel in the Ray and Altman films represents a transformation of cinematic genres that points the way to some major changes in American cinema from the late 1940s to the early Seventies. These transformations can be seen occurring within Nicholas Ray's film itself. It is essentially a *film noir*, but it contains elements foreign to the *film noir* genre. Though entirely different from Altman's *Thieves Like Us*, *They Live By Night* contains in suspension—in tension—formal and contextual elements that make the Altman film possible.

A scene in *They Live By Night* indicates that Ray is aware of the generic forces at work. Bowie (Farley Granger) and Keechie (Cathy O'Donnell) are escaping from the police, from the exaggerated notoriety given them by the press, and from their own fear. They come to the city, wanting to live like 'real people'. They visit a night club and Bowie goes to the Gents to buy a packet of cigarettes. We watch in a mirror as a moustached, slick-haired man enters and asks, 'You're Bowie the Kid, aren't you?' Bowie whips out a gun, the man says, 'Don't be corny, Bowers,' and easily wrests it from him. The man with the moustache says: 'Nothing against you, you understand. We don't want a lot of trigger-happy hillbillies around here. Business is cool right now. Business is good. We don't want to heat it up. You're hot!'

The country outlaw in the city, in a night club, faces a calm but outraged gangster in the environment of *film noir*. Here is the genesis: *film noir* emerged out of the 1930s urban gangster film. Its *mise-en-scène* is despair, generated out of entrapment in the dark city. The central characters, almost always male and alone, are usually escaping or being pursued in a brutal world of shadows and grotesques. Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly* and Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* epitomise and climax the genre. The worlds of these films have almost no light at all and the characters involved are all haunted or brutal or stupid. In the penultimate sequence of *Touch of Evil* Hank Quinlan falls like a wounded dinosaur into a dark, garbage filled slough. At the end of *Kiss Me Deadly* Mike Hammer discovers that the object of his pursuit is a hydrogen bomb that screams its light into the surrounding darkness, destroying him and, presumably, the world.

Before the *film noir* consolidated itself as a genre, another transformation of the gangster film was sporadically making itself seen. This sub-genre concerns fugitives who, unlike their gangster and *film noir* counterparts, are basically innocent in that

Top: Shelley Duwall and Keith Carradine in 'Thieves Like Us'. Left: Farley Granger, Cathy O'Donnell in 'They Live By Night'

whatever crimes they may have committed are mitigated by their economic and moral circumstances, by the fundamental goodness of their characters and the brutality of the pursuit directed against them. Fritz Lang's *You Only Live Once* is the major early example of this form (though it might be traced further back to 'The Mother and the Law' section of *Intolerance*), and it can be seen from time to time through Joseph H. Lewis' *Gun Crazy*, made in the same year as *They Live By Night*. Another factor that distinguishes this sub-genre from the gangster film is that the films are usually set in the country rather than the city. This is what makes the Gents sequence from *They Live By Night* important. The characters of this film are 'country thieves', and the central characters, Bowie and Keechie, are profoundly innocent. When Bowie enters the city he is confronted by a stereotyped urban gangster and told he has no place. However, the place he does inhabit—in the broad sense of the environment created for us by the film—has all the qualities of *film noir*, those outlined above and others I'll speak of later. Therefore, the formal conflicts are enormous, so great that it seems necessary for yet another genre, another form to emerge.

That form was able to realise itself fully with the death of *film noir*. The conventional wisdom has it that *film noir* ended when black and white filming ended. The necessity of using colour made it impossible to create the brooding chiaroscuro *mise-en-scène* which the genre required. That this is not entirely true is evidenced by such recent films as Altman's *The Long Goodbye*, Scorsese's *Mean Streets* and, in its own peculiar way, *The Godfather*. Colour can be modified to incorporate any mood. *Film noir* in its generic fullness may need the formal qualities of black and white photography; but it was the death of the *noir* vision that really preceded the death of its form. *Film noir* subjects are being absorbed into police films. And, whether by accident or not, *Bonnie and Clyde* opened up the minor country thieves variation of the gangster film into a fully fledged genre of its own.

The birth and death of *film noir* certainly needs more detailed study; what can be done here is to examine the dialectical structures of *They Live By Night* and *Thieves Like Us* in order to see how one *noir* film engendered its own opposite. *They Live By Night* is a film about entrapment and enclosure. Its pre-credit sequence shows Bowie and Keechie lying in profile in the dark, embracing and talking. The dark they inhabit isn't a room or any discernible environment. It is merely darkness. The accompanying titles emphasise their isolation: 'This boy and this girl were never properly introduced to the world we live in. To tell their story [cut to title] *They Live By Night*.' Under the credits we see a speeding car, watch the three robbers (just escaped from prison) hold up the driver. We move to a helicopter shot of the three men running, stopping finally by a huge billboard, under which Bowie must hide because of an injured leg. Bowie looks out from behind the supports of the billboard, trapped, waiting in the dark for help. We see very little of his face straight on in this opening sequence. During the robbery we

see mostly the back of his head, until we are given a reaction shot showing his horror at the violence committed by Chicamaw on the car's owner. Under the billboard we see him through a grating. As physically close as the camera stays on the central character, we are allowed little direct contact.

The opening of *Thieves Like Us* couldn't be more different. The film begins with sound, bird sounds, country sounds under the distributor's logo. The first visual is a long, leisurely 360 degree pan of the muted, blue-green country, picking up a team of prisoners on a railroad work car, moving past them to a long shot of a boat on a lake (containing, we discover, Bowie and Chicamaw), continuing its pan until the circle is completed and a cut is made to an approaching car, when action somewhat similar to that which begins *They Live By Night* occurs. Similar in that the car is hijacked by the three thieves. Ray plays the scene seriously; Altman for comedy. Ray plays the sequence tightly, close up; Altman stays at a fair distance, framing the action loosely.

The enclosure of the screen frame is the key element in Ray's construction of his film. That frame becomes, almost metaphorically, the enclosure that is the world of Bowie and Keechie. It is instantly set up for us in the pre-credit sequence just described; it is set up so well and so swiftly that the helicopter shot (unusual enough in a late 1940s film) of the robbers fleeing across the field does not have the lyrical, liberating effect that such shots were to take on in the 1960s. It hasn't this effect precisely because we are not allowed any sense of openness, even in the country setting. Within this same sequence there is a shot of the car and the three men with the landscape open in the background. Again, the tight framing, the greyness of the landscape, removes any apprehension of freedom, any sense of open area.

Later in the film there is a bank robbery and a car crash in which Bowie is injured. He is brought to Keechie to be looked after. At this moment she is indifferent to everything, including Chicamaw's crude attempt to grab her. The sequence takes place at night, with Keechie separated from the other characters by a broken pane of glass in the black, rubble-filled world they inhabit. At one moment in the sequence she begins to preen herself, combing her hair, at which point Ray dissolves to a shot of blowing trees. The shot lasts a few seconds and then dissolves back to Keechie now tending the wounded Bowie, a scene shot from behind the bars of Bowie's bed. In Anderson's novel and in both film versions this sequence is the important transition into the love affair between Keechie and Bowie. For Ray it is done with depressing irony. The insert of the blowing trees is not the visual counterpoint of the free sensuality of Keechie's hair combing, nor the conventional lyricism of an impending love. It is a montage of impossibilities. The openness that Keechie and Bowie will never be allowed to enter.

The helicopter shots and the insert of blowing trees is about the farthest Ray ever removes his camera from his characters. Mostly single or multiple close-ups fill the screen. But the result of this framing is

alienation rather than intimacy. This is a very important characteristic of *film noir*: the closer we get to the characters, the more we are repelled; the more we are repelled, the more we want to look. The attraction of the dark world is fatal. Be it the moral darkness of *The Big Sleep*, the baroque labyrinths of *Touch of Evil* or the sadistic hysteria of *Kiss Me Deadly*, we want in, or at least want a safe vantage point from which to witness the nightmare. The characters, as part of this nightmare, have the same deadly attraction/repulsion for us. They are grotesques, vicious and threatening people. The 'heroes' are either ambiguous, as in *Touch of Evil* or, by their wit, tenuously removed from the nightmare, as is Bogart's Marlowe in *The Big Sleep*. (In Altman's reconsideration of the genre in *The Long Goodbye*, Marlowe isn't even allowed wit or moral courage; he is a somnambulist in his own bad dream.) The 'hero' and 'heroine' of *They Live By Night* are caught in a bad dream as well, but as characters they are almost neuter, barely eliciting our pity no matter how strongly we (and Ray) are on their side. Farley Granger's Bowie is dead-pan, acted upon by events, hemmed in by the vicious, one-eyed Chicamaw (Howard Da Silva) and the seemingly avuncular but ultimately violent T-Dub (Jay C. Flippen). Cathy O'Donnell's Keechie is less than dead-pan. She is so beaten as never to express a particular emotion throughout the course of the film.

These two are as little at home in their *film noir* environment as we are. Bowie robs banks, but it is a thing he cannot help. Keechie is a rural waif who has known nothing of life before meeting Bowie. Their exile from the world is heightened by the fact that they join together, forming a bond of insecurity within a threatening environment. Ray has them marry, an event that does not occur in the novel or in Altman's film treatment. Problems of Hollywood morality aside, the way Ray treats the marriage ceremony itself emphasises his characters' distance from their world and ours. At night, Bowie and Keechie emerge from a bus they have taken to escape the police. A neon 'Marriages Performed' sign can be seen in the darkness. They go into a diner, the sign still visible outside. They hear organ music. 'There's Hawkins' class B wedding,' the waitress says. When they get back on the bus, Bowie comments on how terrible a twenty dollar wedding must be. Then he asks Keechie if she'll marry him. She responds with her usual vigour: 'If you want me to.' They run off the bus to Hawkins with the camera tracking them in profile and from behind, staying away from their faces for much of the degrading performance, which includes Hawkins selling them a used car so that they can continue their escape.

Of course Hawkins is a 'thief like us'; but not merely in the way he cheats Bowie and Keechie out of their money. He cheats them of their dignity and their innocence; the degradation he puts them through emphasises their separation from the world. Simply by moving with them from behind, Ray allows us to share their point of view of the proceedings and at the same time to see more of its shabbiness than they can. They are unable to cope with their own

situation; we see both them and the setting, realise the despair of the one and the ugliness of the other, and are therefore caught, as much as they are, in the dark oppressive world. We are within and without simultaneously. Before he is gunned down by the police, Bowie returns to Hawkins to find another way of escape. 'In a way I'm a thief the way you are,' he says. 'But I don't sell hope where there ain't any.'

Ray, like Hawkins, does not sell hope: he depicts only despair and the irreconcilability of the innocent forced to be an outlaw by the dark, vicious world. Altman's country and light version of Anderson's novel lessens the despair without diminishing the notion of irreconcilability. Altman re-creates the depression Thirties (Ray does not), but despite the clothing, cars, buildings, the ubiquitous Coca-Cola bottles, and the 1930s radio programmes that Altman uses almost as a music track, he has not made just another 'evocation' film. Rather, by using the basic plot of the novel, he has made an alternative to Ray's film in which the entrapment and destruction of innocents takes place in the open country, in the light instead of the dark, in a world that appears to be free and pure. Altman's distancing effect is therefore quite different from Ray's. *They Live By Night* is contemporary in time, and its film noir elements remove us from any intense identification with its characters. *Thieves Like Us* is a re-creation of a distant time, but a re-creation done with such a high degree of stylisation and self-consciousness that we cannot be absolutely sure how far our sentiments and sympathies should extend.

If we look again at the opening of the two films, the differences will be further emphasised. Ray's Bowie hides behind the grating of a billboard before Keechie picks him up. When she does so, the two of them are shot from the inside of the truck's cab and from the grating behind it. Altman's Keechie (Shelley Duvall) does not appear until much later in the film. In *Thieves Like Us*, after the initial hijacking of the car, T-Dub (Bert Remsen), Chicamaw (John Schuck) and Bowie (Keith Carradine) hole up in a deserted farmhouse. The shot inside the house is long and wide angle, the three sit in their underwear and, despite Bowie's sullenness, joke in the freedom of a thoroughly male bond. The only sense of their isolation is an exterior shot of the house with the three men huddled at the window, looking for the source of a noise that has frightened them. Throughout the film less is made of the threat of an inhibiting world and more of this bond of men and the bond of the two lovers, these self-protecting entities that eventually crumble.

The crumbling of camaraderie is of great importance to Altman. In *They Live By Night* Chicamaw and T-Dub were intruders on Keechie and Bowie's world. In *Thieves Like Us* Keechie becomes the intruder. She appears in the film when the three men are sitting in a spacious interior, joking and laughing. She comes to the door and moves immediately to the kitchen. In one of those deep field shots that Altman does so well, the three men are composed centre frame, with Keechie clearly seen screen right and

far rear, going about her work. Where Ray has Keechie and Bowie first get acquainted in a dark garage, Altman frames them gently and loosely on a bright porch. There is a casualness which marks his whole approach, alternating scenes between Bowie and Keechie with bank robberies committed by the three comrades, and hilarious domestic episodes in the house where the men are hiding. One such scene has a characteristic ambivalence to it. The three men sit at dinner with the family who are looking after them. Mama yells at the children to eat properly, the robbers read of their exploits in the papers. The intercutting and overlapping dialogue puts the banality of family life and the life and death problems of Bowie, T-Dub and Chicamaw on the same level. Altman, up to this point at least, is warm to all his characters; we remain uncertain as to our exact response. The lightness, however precarious, remains dominant until the episode of the car crash, which occurs much later in Altman's film than it does in *They Live By Night*.

As in the Ray film (and in the novel), the injured Bowie is brought to Keechie to be cared for. Her room is shabby but not oppressive, papered over with music sheets of the period. She begins by treating Bowie as coldly as does her Cathy O'Donnell counterpart, but does not repeat the line (from the novel and in the Ray film): 'I'd do this for a dog.' Bowie's gun is prominent as she undresses him; but this visual foreshadowing of doom is countered later with light streaming in at the windows. The consummation of their love is done with childlike tenderness and humour, although its potential sentimentality is undercut with an hilarious manipulation of the soundtrack. (Earlier in the film Altman undercuts sentimentality in another way: Bowie befriends a dog and uses it as a blanket to protect him from the night and his fears.

'*They Live By Night*': 'Hawkins' twenty dollar wedding'



'*Thieves Like Us*': Chicamaw (John Schuck) plays at bank robberies with Mattie's children



The next day, the dog merely walks off and Bowie makes no further mention of it.)* What is important about the love scene is not only its offhandedness and charm, but the fact that the joking love between male friends is transferred to the exclusive love shared by a man and woman.

The climax of this transfer occurs in a major sequence that Ray does not handle at all. In *They Live By Night*, the last bank robbery takes place early in the narrative, before it concentrates on Bowie and Keechie alone. The job is not shown; we see its aftermath, Bowie riding in the car, Chicamaw hiding in the back, with news of the debacle (T-Dub was killed) on the car radio. Chicamaw becomes violent and abusive, upset over the job and jealous of Bowie's notoriety. Bowie throws him out at gunpoint. We have a close-up of Chicamaw's grotesque face, cigar and one dead eye, as he yells 'I'm better off without you,' and a cut to his receding figure in the car's rear view mirror.

In the Altman film, the last job occurs later in the narrative. The three men get together (T-Dub, like Bowie, has found himself a woman) and plan. The bond is cemented for the last time and T-Dub says, 'They'll never get three boys like us together again. That's for damn sure.'† We see the hold-up, which turns violent as T-Dub and Chicamaw are forced to shoot a bank teller. We cut to the three of them in a room. T-Dub wants them all to go with him to pick up his girl. Bowie wants to leave for Keechie. Chicamaw says, 'You're getting pretty stuck up for a country boy,' and they leave Bowie alone. Driving home at night, he hears of T-Dub's death and Chicamaw's capture. He returns to Keechie, who is lying on the floor in front of a fire, angry at Bowie for leaving her, and she reproaches him in this warm, domestic environment: 'You took them. It was me or them and you knew it and you took them.' Her reflection is seen distorted in a mirror. The camera zooms in on Bowie and the fire as he says sadly, 'Goodnight, T-Dub.'

From the warmth of the fire Altman cuts to the cold blue sign of the motel where Bowie and Keechie will spend their last days, and where Mattie, T-Dub's sister, will betray Bowie to the police. It is here that he decides he must help Chicamaw break out of prison. He lies to Keechie about having to visit his mother, and what follows is a bravura sequence in which Bowie, posing as a police officer, escorts his old comrade out of the penitentiary. After this sequence, Ray and Altman almost cross. As Bowie is driving Chicamaw out of the prison, Chicamaw stops the car, takes out a hostage and kills him. This infuriates Bowie; and Chicamaw, like his counterpart in *They Live By Night*, grumbles about how he is made to look like thirty cents next to the publicity Bowie is getting. Bowie stops the car and throws him out. But instead of the grotesque close-up and receding figure in the mirror that Ray gives us, we see the car drive off as Chicamaw's sad call to Bowie echoes down the road.

*A dog appears in a similar sequence in *They Live By Night*; but it merely appears. Ray does nothing with it.

†In *They Live By Night*, T-Dub has to beat Bowie to make him join them.

Ray guides our affections and sympathies all the way. If we can't 'identify' with his Bowie and Keechie, we are at least certain that they are the central characters and certain of our own sense of their despair and isolation. But Altman feels affection for, or at least an attraction to, almost all his characters. He is too much like Jean Renoir, and since he condemns almost no one, he offers us little in the way of directed sympathy or, more accurately, gives us little moral direction. If we are all thieves, the only pity is that some of us get caught. Altman's world and its people remain brave and open, quite the opposite of those of the Ray film.

In Anderson's novel it is implicit, and in the two films explicit, that T-Dub's sister betrays Bowie to the police in order to get her husband out of prison. In *They Live By Night*, Bowie walks into the trap in the darkness, going to the cabin where Keechie is waiting, looking at her through the screen door, the almost final image of separation and confinement. He is shot down by the police. Keechie runs to him; we see the back of her head over his body, she turns her head towards the police, looks down again and then, moving away, looks almost directly into the camera. With her eyes slightly averted and an expression of hardness and despair, we look at her as she literally disappears into the dark. She doesn't move: Ray simply has the lighting on her face go down *before* the final fade. This sets the seal on the isolation of the characters. They have been removed from the world all along; now they are removed from us, literally taken away into the darkness of their own social impotence and despair.

Altman sees it differently. When Bowie returns to the motel, Keechie is in the office with Mattie. It is dawn rather than night. We see the two women behind the screen door, the bright red of a Coca-Cola ice-box punctuating the blue haze, a romantic poem punctuating the soundtrack. Bowie enters his cabin and the police proceed to shoot it to pieces. We see Keechie's reaction, first as she smashes a Coke bottle in horror, then as she screams violently and in slow motion (a fine switch on the convention of showing the person murdered in slow motion). She remains behind the screen as the police drag out Bowie's body in a bloody blanket and lay it in the mud. Altman cuts on this to another old radio track: this time Father Coughlin, a famous 1930s upholder of the American Way. The scene is revealed to be a railway station. Keechie sits in the waiting room, talking to a stranger (in fact, Joan Tewkesbury, co-author of the screenplay), telling the woman how her baby will not be named after its father, who she says crossed them up by dying of consumption. Keechie then joins the crowd going up the stairs to the platform. We see one more shot of her impassive face and then cut to a far, slow-motion shot of the crowd moving as the credits roll up.

Anderson allowed both Bowie and Keechie to die. Ray indicates a spiritual death for his Keechie. Altman, almost in defiance of Ray's dark point of view, allows Keechie strength to enter the world—a grim, faceless, depression-ridden world to be sure—but at least a world in which some sad flow of life continues.



'They Live By Night': Cathy O'Donnell, Helen Craig

It is not a question of hope. Altman's vision (even as it was in *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*) is as hopeless as Ray's. What Ray adds and Altman subtracts, the factor inherent in the *film noir* genre as a whole, is despair. *Film noir* allows no one to win, particularly not the audience. They see only their own defencelessness magnified and their darkness and fears reinforced. The new genre that has risen from the night still lacks hope, but allows for defence and reduces fear. Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* were merry folk in a bright, hungry world. Innocents in the garden of evil. Their deaths only reinforced the vitality of their lives. The whole crop of *Bonnie and Clyde* spin-offs, as divergent as *Bloody Mama*, *Dillinger*, and more recently *Badlands* and *The Sugarland Express* as well as *Thieves Like Us*, add the vitality missing from the *film noir* genre.

'Thieves Like Us': Louise Fletcher, Shelley Duval



Tanya says of Hank Quinlan in *Touch of Evil*, 'He was some kind of man.' Just what kind we are left in doubt. In the new *film lumière* we are in no doubt that these are people of spirit, even kindness, who, however lost and beaten, however amoral, are allowed a certain triumph to their lives.

Perhaps film no longer needs to show us the darkness. It's inside us and we are well aware of it. Film will always have to show us losers; that reinforcement we seem always to need. But we need as well a dialectic. If we are going to lose let us at least go down brightly. If we are going to be destroyed, let us at least go down fighting and in the sun.

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'Nine Days in '26': source material. Miners' leader A. J. Cook; 'Punch' cartoon of the Triple Alliance; offering a lift, from 'Royal Cavalcade'; the face of unemployment (still photograph)

Robert Vas' BBC-Television film on the General Strike, *Nine Days in '26*, aroused considerable controversy when it was shown earlier this year. Here David Wilson argues for, and Jerome Kuehl against, the film's method.



The truth of Film History

David Wilson and Jerome Kuehl



Robert Vas could not have known, when he began work in April 1973 on his television film about the General Strike, that another miners' strike would oblige the BBC to postpone its showing. *Nine Days in '26* was originally scheduled for transmission on January 11th 1974, bang in the middle of what the then Tory government was describing as the worst industrial crisis since the blackest days of postwar austerity Britain. To have shown it then, when the miners were supposed to be holding the country to ransom (provoking, among other panic reactions, an early closedown for television), would have made it political dynamite. Safely defused by the new Labour government's settlement of the strike, the film was eventually shown on April 19th, when Britain's winter of discontent seemed only a bad memory and everyone was agreed that the miners were after all a special case.

The timing was fortuitous, but it threw an ironic spotlight on the film's argument. As history would have it, the events of the day before yesterday were in some ways a mirror image of what had happened nearly half a century before. Now as then a miners' strike brought a government to the brink of collapse; now as then a Catholic cardinal warned from the pulpit about the danger within. Robert Vas and his co-producer Tom Scott Robson could not have wished for a more contemporary confirmation of what their film was about.

Beyond its record of the history of the General Strike, *Nine Days in '26* is about the persistence of myth. The strike is set in the context of Lloyd George's country fit for heroes: dole queues, the miners' lock-out, the Emergency Powers Act, the general rush to industrial strife which followed in the wake of the war. But 1926, refracted through film of the 1930s, is also seen by Vas in terms of its legacy. 'Who in 1918,' says the opening commentary, 'could have foreseen the pain and the brutality of the Thirties?' Moving about in time, juxtaposing contemporary newsreel with later fabrications, weaving interviews with witnesses into its patchwork narrative, the film sets a fuse to the mythology of the General Strike. The evidence of yesterday's witnesses corroborates the evidence of a fundamental conflict of attitudes. The evidence of film and photographs and voices, from the time and ten years after it and now, demonstrates how that conflict, fed by the authorised version of events in 1926, has persisted. If it hadn't, there would have been no reason for the BBC to postpone the film merely because of another miners' strike.

Critical reaction to *Nine Days in '26* was generally enthusiastic. David Robinson in *The Times* placed it in the 'British tradition of poetic documentary that derives from Humphrey Jennings and Lindsay Anderson.' The film's accomplishment was 'the concentration and precision with which the words and the images are used to relate the story.' In contrast to the 'slack, slick habits' of most documentary compilations, here was a film in which 'pictures (stills as well as film) and the memories of the survivors are complementary elements in a dynamic narrative.' Writing in the *New Statesman*, I called the film 'the best television documentary for some considerable time' and concluded that as a consciously committed film it 'gave a much needed knock to the spurious notion of "balance" which blights so many television documentaries.'

This concept of balance—which generally settles at a point somewhere between a pair of received ideas—and the way in which it is interpreted by the BBC (and to a lesser extent by the commercial television companies) is one key to the generally depressed state of British television documentary. But it was not so much in its weighted balance as in its use of original film material that Robert Vas' documentary provoked adverse comment. Paul Rotha, in a letter to *The Times*, was critical of the film's use of extracts from *Today We Live*, the film which he produced (and Ralph Bond and Ruby Grierson directed) in 1936, and asked for 'some yardstick for dating and authenticating this old celluloid.' The danger, as he saw it, was that 'TV's easy temptations ask for a slackening of conscience about historical fact on film.'

Paul Rotha's comment reflects on the vexed question of the use of film as historical evidence. One side of this argument insists that source material—archive film, newsreel, fictional reconstruction—must be acknowledged and identified; the viewer must be left in no doubt that the film he is seeing is what it purports or might be taken to be. This was the approach adopted, and scrupulously adhered to, by the makers of Thames Television's 26-part *World at War* series (see Penelope Houston's article *Witnesses of War* in the Spring 1974 SIGHT AND SOUND). Jerome Kuehl, who as script associate of this series was closely involved in decisions about the use of source material, has been a persistent advocate of this point of view. Below is his reaction to *Nine Days in '26*.

A Question of Confidence

First, the good news. Thanks to Robert Vas and his production team, BBC-2 viewers this spring had a chance to see a vivid panorama of films about life in Britain from before the First World War to the mid-1930s—documentaries, semi-documentaries, newsreels, sponsored industrial films, even Hollywood-type historical reconstructions. None of these films are new discoveries; but it is always a pleasure to see again excerpts from gems like *A Day in the Life of a Coal Miner* (1910); *Royal Cavalcade* (1935); *Today We Live* (1936) and *The World in Revolt* (1937).

Viewers seeing the films for the first time ought to have found the anthology a particular delight, spanning as it did more than twenty-five years of British film-making: *A Day in the Life of a Coal Miner*,

made for the LNWR to show off their coal-shifting equipment, also shows—unintentionally—something of conditions in the mines before the First World War, when it was still common for women to work in the industry. *Royal Cavalcade*, confected by British International as its contribution to King George's Silver Jubilee, is, to modern audiences, an engaging piece of show-biz hokum, which contains irresistibly (if unintentionally) comic reconstructions of Great Events (NFT filmgoers particularly treasure Scott of the Antarctic lurching from his tent to die amidst a swirl of white cornflakes). *Today We Live* is an early example of what we would today call co-operative, or collective, film-making. Produced by Paul Rotha, it was made with the active collaboration of the Rhondda valley miners whose lives it sought to portray; and it contains striking scenes in which the miners turned themselves into actors to show how they had gleaned coal from the slag-heaps during the early years of the great slump. The BBC, and Robert Vas, deserve high praise for bringing these treasures from the archives to the attention of a wide public.

Now, the bad news. No one not already familiar with this material will have been able to recognise it for what it is. Because what Robert Vas and the team which made their story of the General Strike, *Nine Days in '26*, have done is to use it as if it were all actuality material filmed during the 1920s and, in some cases, during the General Strike itself.

Thus, the point that working conditions in British mines were grim after the Great War is made by showing women mine workers filmed in 1910. The recurring point that before, and in the seven months after the strike, the miners' life was a bleak one is made by repeating inserts of Paul Rotha's 1936 miner-actors scrabbling on slag heaps. *Royal Cavalcade* contributes idyllic 1935 scenes of Britain—including John Mills in a punt—to the portrait of irresponsible ruling class behaviour in the 1920s. A football match between strikers and police, middle-class motorists offering lifts to girls and the reaction of listeners to a BBC transmission as the strike nears its end are shown by dramatic reconstructions from *Royal Cavalcade*. And so on.

There is some authentic General Strike material in Vas' film: e.g. some clips appear as they were cut in to the compilation sections of *Royal Cavalcade*—though here too reconstructions are wrongly identified as 'newsreel'. There are even sequences from a film made at the time—*London's Strange New Mood* (1926), but in the context, such scenes seem almost intrusive.

In other words, with only a few exceptions, the archive material shown in *Nine Days* is mis-identified, misrepresented, misused. Do such things really matter? Of course they do. Films do not just happen. They are made. Robert Vas and his researchers knew exactly what they were doing. They knew where they got their material from, and they know why they used it as they did. And this is what is so dismaying. Because Robert Vas is, indisputably, one of the most talented and conscientious film-makers in the BBC. That even he should, evidently, be content to use archive film with such wantonness shows something very alarming

Opposite: pit pony sees the light of day. 'Leitmotif' shots: unemployment in the 1930s; the slag-heap sequence from 'Today We Live'

about the standards which have come to be accepted in making TV documentaries.

These standards, such as they are, rest either on the belief that no one really notices how archive film is used or, if people do, it doesn't matter—a belief which exhibits an unattractive disdain for the viewer. Or they rest on the belief that no one takes the visual material literally; in other words, that viewers think of visual material as simply a kind of visual counterpoint to the important matters at hand: music, effects, interviews and, most especially, commentary. Therefore, it is perfectly in order for the production team to decide what they want to say, and then to set out to find film to illustrate their thoughts. If the film they find doesn't fit, so much the worse for the film.

As some film-makers have always known, there is no need to misrepresent archive film or use unacknowledged fictional reconstructions in order to make passionate, persuasive documentaries. (For example, it should not tax a commentary writer's ingenuity to devise a phrase like 'this film was made in 1910; in 1925 conditions were no better.') Of course, it is more difficult to make films which use archive material scrupulously than it is to make films which treat them as visual sausage stuffing. But that is hardly an argument in favour of maintaining sausage output.

Nine Days was, obviously, not a frivolous piece of work. It was an extremely serious film designed, if I read its producer's intentions correctly, to teach viewers important truths about Trade Unions, Trade Union leaderships, the Class Struggle, Capitalism, Stalinism, working class solidarity, personal responsibility, political betrayal, Workers' Control, Government control of Broadcasting, mass media, and a host of other matters of the most acute relevance to life in this country today. And so it might have done. But in order to have confidence in what the commentary tells me, I have first to have confidence in what I see. And since the film is so manifestly lacking in scruple about what it *shows*, how can I be expected to pay any attention to what it *says*? That, naturally, is true not just of *Nine Days*, but of any documentary which, for its own purposes, uses film made at another time, for other reasons, without letting me know what it is doing, and why.

JEROME KUEHL

Films are Made

'Films do not just happen. They are made.' Jerome Kuehl's response to Robert Vas' film derives from his concern for what could be called the evident authenticity of film used as source material. Audiences, and particularly television audiences (already lulled off their guard by the very multiplicity of programme types), are easily susceptible to actively unscrupulous or more often simply careless methods of documentary film-making. By nature a manipulative medium, film readily lends itself to misrepresentation, all the way from marginal overstatement to straightforward lies. And in the area of documentary compilation, use of inadequately identified footage can be the father of innocent fakery.

Reconstruction can—and does—become 'actuality' in the passage from one compilation to another. But equally there is a very fine line between manipulative distortion (even when it is unintentional) and the selective, controlled use of source material as a constituent part of a total argument. It is in this context that I think Jerome Kuehl's strictures on *Nine Days in '26* are misapplied.

Jerome Kuehl's comments would rightly apply to a documentary film which purported to be a straightforward history of the General Strike. To have used extracts from *Royal Cavalcade* and *Today We Live* in such a film would clearly have been irresponsible. And also unnecessary: close inspection of *Nine Days in '26* in fact reveals a wealth of source material (newsreel film, still photographs, cartoons, headlines from the *British Gazette* and the *British Worker*) which is strictly contemporary. But despite its title Robert Vas' film is not simply a record of the strike. It is also very far from being a carelessly researched and shoddily put together piece of work (one example of that was the recent BBC film scrapbook for 1945, which did use film as 'visual sausage stuffing').

Nine Days in '26 asks more of its audience than that it should simply observe history in the making. It is a film less about the events themselves than about attitudes. The point of using extracts from, for instance, the 1937 newsreel *The World in Revolt* (where the strike is still the shrill certainty of 'this menace to liberty') is to illustrate the persistence of attitudes which in large measure determined both the course and the outcome of a national strike against industrial conditions under a Conservative government. In the same way, sequences from *Royal Cavalcade* provide a running commentary on a Britain in which punting on the river and queuing for the dole can safely co-exist and in which a miners' strike is seen not as a demand for a living wage but as a threat to the established order. In this context the football match between strikers and policemen has a double-edged irony: where else could 'Where else could this happen?' be regarded as a properly amusing comment on such an intrinsically British happening?

Throughout the film Robert Vas juxtaposes evidence of a nation divided by incomprehension. The 1930s film acts as a retrospective comment on the events of 1926; and the interviews with those who remember reveal all too clearly that nothing much has changed (the miners' strike of more recent memory was also regarded as an affront to the nation). At the centre is the *leitmotif* of those slag-heap shots from *Today We Live*. It was not only before, during and immediately after the strike that the miners' life was bleak: to have labelled those shots would have been to invite an audience to miss the larger point they were making in the context of the film. Film showing women mine workers in 1910 sets no date on the point that a society which tolerated women working in mining would also take a general strike in its stride. (And in fact the film's researcher, Elizabeth Sussex, has since told me that there were women surface workers long after 1910.)

At no time in the film does non-contemporary material *masquerade* as actuality.

Robert Vas says this of his method: 'In more ways than one—though not always in the literal sense—every period is clearly signposted. 1926 material is quite deliberately mixed with post-World War One and 1930s material, on the one hand to show a sense of historical continuity, the roots of the events; on the other to show the event and its consequences in the 1930s, implanted within the event itself. Shots were judged and used not only for what they show but for *how* they show it.'

As a general principle I would agree (as indeed would Robert Vas) with Jerome Kuehl's point that documentary film should be identified where there is any danger of its being misinterpreted. But the corresponding danger in treating film from the past as though it were historically (ideologically) neutral is that historical film can mask a historical untruth. *Royal Cavalcade*, show-biz hokum or not, is one version of what happened in Britain during the Twenties and Thirties. Its place in Robert Vas' film is to demonstrate the prevailing national spirit implicit in the fact that a retrospective film like this could be made in the decade of mass unemployment and hunger marches. The identification argument in any case begs the question of the neutrality of film. The emotive effect of a



Women down the mine, from the 1910 'Day in the Life of a Coal Miner'

piece of film is determined by the context in which it is shown as well as by its subject matter; or as John Berger has commented, 'A photograph is already a message about the event it records.'

The World at War and *Nine Days in '26* do not represent irreconcilable differences of approach to documentary film-making. They are just two different approaches to two different subjects. To some extent, of course, method is determined by subject. In this sense *The World at War* series, operating in what is by comparison a relatively non-controversial area, could afford its methodological principles; it was not, and was not meant to be, a personal history. But Robert Vas chose to make a film about a subject which still sparks bitter memories; his film was partisan and meant to be. To have labelled the source material could have choked the personal voice, the use of film not only as 'evidence' but to make connections. And while directors like Robert Vas continue to make films with a personal voice, there may be some hope that television documentary will not entirely vanish into the desert of bland anonymity prescribed by the BBC's handbook for documentary producers.

DAVID WILSON

Film REVIEWS

Chinatown

There is a moment in *Chinatown* (CIC) when one wonders if one has seen aright, or simply been caught up in the spell cast by the scattered, elusive memories of time past: a single shot in the sequence where private eye Jake Gittes gets his dangerous charmer to bed for the first and only time, and the soft bedroom light momentarily transforms her chalky 1930s make-up and blood-red lips into the inscrutable mask of a Chinese dancer. Sleek, seductive, and likely to turn up in all the wrong places to thicken the plot with an appallingly plausible explanation, she is of course the enigmatic enchantress without whom no Chandleresque plot would be complete; but at this point she is something more, and the traditional lure of the East begins to pervade the film with its twin auras of romance and corruption.

At the very beginning, though, we might almost be back in Bogart land. Sitting comfortably in his office, Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson) watches as a client flips agitatedly through a series of photographs of his wife taken *in flagrante*. 'All right, Curly,' says Jake as the distressed client clutches for support, 'you can't eat the Venetian blinds, I just had 'em installed Wednesday.' 'She was just no good,' moans Curly. 'You're right,' Jake agrees cheerfully. As a classic example of the wisecracking private eye, Jake Gittes rightly follows a classic pattern from the moment he is hired by a wife to find out what her errant husband is up to. The wife turns out to be no wife but an impostor hired for purposes unknown; the husband is duly murdered; and the real wife (Faye Dunaway), turning up initially with icy disapproval but melting gradually into clinging dependence, leads him into a nightmare web of intrigue ranging from civic corruption to incest by way of some bizarre but equally classic encounters in a morgue, an old people's home, a nocturnal wasteland inhabited by a smiler with a knife (Polanski himself), a house behind whose windows the secret is momentarily glimpsed.

Hollywood is clearly good for Polanski, not necessarily in that he makes better films there, but because its disciplines make him give audiences (and indeed critics) something neat, firm and familiar to hold on to instead of leaving them to—hopefully—pluck the meaning of a film like *What?* out of its airy, apparently intangible insouciance. With *Chinatown*, as with *Rosemary's Baby*, he handles the mechanics of the plot with a ruthless brilliance that is immediately involving.

From the moment he pulls the voyeur trick of showing us a puzzled Gittes watching his prey through field-glasses as he stares enigmatically out to sea, one is hooked, watching intrigued as Jake slips a watch under the wheels of a car, tremulously preceding him as he enters an apartment where a cabbage on the kitchen floor loudly proclaims that all is not well. Twice, reverse angle shots from hunted back to hunter as Gittes trails his quarry make one shrink back with him in fear of discovery. An angled long shot down into a parched river bed, where a man brooding over a handful of

pebbles exchanges some tantalisingly unheard words with a boy ambling by on a horse, lends a touch of surrealist mystery to a scene later revealed to be quite mundane. Above all, a beautifully judged line of dialogue invariably picks up the threads of the plot seconds before one gets there oneself, to send one scampering down new avenues of speculation. 'The guy's got water on the brain,' mutters a colleague as Gittes describes where he has been while tailing the supposedly errant husband; and immediately the hint sends one washing along on a flood of speculation, as the references to water really begin to multiply and its role in the plot gradually emerges.

Paradoxically, however—and it is done with cool, Hitchcockian cunning—as the mystery clarifies, the sense of disorientation begins. This starts at a fairly innocuous thriller-convention level, with noises off never quite what they seem—sinister scratching outside a door proves to be workmen scraping off the name of a deceased partner, the roar of an express train turns out to be water gushing down a conduit pipe—but gradually escalates in inverse ratio to Gittes' conviction that he is at last reaching solid ground. The key factor in this disorientation is the setting, Los Angeles in 1937, with the familiar city of today reduced to its former more modest dimensions by being surrounded with a suburbia of rocks and arid desert. Presented with hallucinatingly accurate period detail (never for a moment overplayed for fashionable nostalgia), it yet remains curiously elusive: a city caught at a vital moment of change when the 'desert community', as one of the characters describes it, is about to step out of the past into the future. Here, in this American city which seems to become more alien the further one penetrates into it—Mexican policemen, Japanese gardeners, Chinese servants, and finally the

mysterious Chinatown itself—the appropriately named arch-villain Noah Cross (John Huston) prepares to steer his ark of respectability—which he founded on the good works of his son-in-law (the past) and launched by recourse to civic corruption and the murder of that same son-in-law (the present)—towards the haven that will crown his wealth with immortality: the future.

Poor Jake Gittes, meanwhile, remains locked in the past, and for all the ingenuity and accuracy of his sleuthing, is no match at all for his adversary. 'Want to know what happens to inquisitive guys?' says the evil little gnome with the knife as he delicately slits open Jake's nostril. 'They lose their noses.' Somewhere along the road Jake loses his sense of direction, caught in a romantic fantasy of his own making which locks him into the past and leaves him helpless against the man of the future. There is a sense here, almost, of a time loop as he lies in bed after making love and reluctantly confides his memory—or premonition?—of the woman he once tried to help during his days on the Chinatown police force but instead destroyed. 'Forget it, Jake, it's Chinatown,' says a friend as he stares brokenly at the ghostly white car in the dark street where the woman he loves has just died a horrible death; and as Noah Cross, the man indirectly and directly responsible, fades discreetly away, presumably to become a respected citizen again.

'It's Chinatown': a warning not to stir up forces that cannot be controlled, that are better left to stir agreeably in the no-man's-land between unconsciousness and memory. Sam Spade was once lured into a love as hopeless by the faithless Brigid O'Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon*, but where Jake Gittes falls headlong into the trap he digs for himself, Spade was enough of a realist to retain, while always hoping, one eye open against the possibility of betrayal. Cynics, as someone commented of Hemingway, lean so far backwards to avoid sentiment that they inevitably overbalance; and once their defences are down, there is no limit to the romantic imagination.

It is in this subterranean passage of *Chinatown* that Polanski rejoins his more overtly personal self of *What?*, wryly commenting on the sad fact that art and life so seldom coincide. 'Yes, yes, I remember, I remember now. What splendour!' cries the old art collector in *What?*, sinking back in ecstasy on his deathbed as the innocent intruder vouchsafes him a glimpse of the perfection of her breasts. For him, reality at last merges with imagination, past with present,

'Chinatown': Jack Nicholson, John Huston



and he dies, happy to have added one authentic treasure to his collection. But for Gittes, fashioning his great love from some ideal in his past, and then watching his imperfect creation crumble to nothingness in the light of reality, there is no such reconciliation... and will perhaps never be until he is as old and wise as the patriarch of *What?* or Noah Cross himself.

TOM MILNE

Black Holiday

In 1931, the Italian government forced all university professors to sign a loyalty oath, swearing allegiance to the Fascist regime. In the whole country, only thirteen refused to do so. *La Villeggiatura* or *Black Holiday* (The Other Cinema), Marco Leto's first feature film, tells the story of one Professor Rossini, a fictional invention nevertheless closely based on fact, who might have been one of those thirteen. Rossini is incarcerated on a small island with other political prisoners—communists and leftists. Despite his courage in refusing to sign the oath, he is relatively apolitical: he believes in free speech, democracy, his own *Lehrfreiheit*, but he doesn't feel close to the leftists who comprise most of the prison population. In fact, he quickly discovers that he has much more in common with the island commandant (Adolfo Celi), an old admirer and friend of his father, than with his prison companions.

Rossini has some money; and they don't: there lies all the difference. He rapidly receives permission to leave the barracks and find lodgings in the town and, through the good offices of the commandant, his wife and child are allowed to join him. They spend much time on the beach and in the garden of their new 'home' and generally lead a superficially idyllic life as Rossini works slowly on an historical essay, or plays the piano, a gift of the commandant. There's the irony of the title, for as Leto says, the film is also 'the story of a moral holiday, during which, then as now, there are enough alibis to convince one to give up the struggle.' The seduction of Rossini by the commandant very nearly succeeds, despite Rossini's occasional outbursts of righteous anger (as, for instance, when he is forbidden to hold history classes with the other prisoners). But when Scagnetti, the unofficial leader of the prisoners, is murdered by the guards, Rossini

explodes. The moral holiday is over and he must choose sides. He escapes from the island, presumably to join the budding resistance to fascism. The film ends with a title that explains that Rossini 'died' twice: first in Spain in 1936, then on April 18th, 1948. The first date is understandable enough; the second indicates the moral and spiritual death of many Italian left-liberals which is symbolically marked by the first victory of the Christian Democrats in Italian postwar elections.

Leto was born in 1931 and studied law and film before becoming a critic. He later collaborated on a number of films with Franco Rossi and Mario Monicelli (among others) before directing several television films and plays. He comes late to feature films and his background obviously stands him in good stead, for *Black Holiday* has a power and depth that stem both from intellectual maturity and sure technical expertise. It is a hypnotic gem of a film, carefully cut and crafted, revealing a depth of irony and understanding that are as rare as they are valuable. *Black Holiday* is a profoundly political film: both because it is about politics and because it is itself a political instrument. And it is exceptionally successful within its prescribed limits, as so few political films are.

Leto's talent is to understand that 'there are no political choices which are not at the same time moral choices' and to build on this truth a kind of mildly Brechtian structure that fascinates, and eventually forces us to analyse our own actions in the light of Rossini's story. Leto has directed the film to a specific audience: intellectuals of the left, the people who do most of the writing and thinking about films and books in Western culture. For Marco Leto, we are all, like Rossini, 'imprisoned without knowing it in the villa with the piano and the books.' It is only once in a great while that we are roused from our intellectual lethargy to real action by some event as pointed and dramatic as the death of Scagnetti is for Rossini. If we take sides it is with our words and not our lives, and the tyrannies of contemporary government take their slow pendulum swings between 'fascism' and 'liberalism' regularly and contemptuously.

In a key scene, the benign commandant explains to Rossini that his great liberal hero Giolitti had been tapping phones as early as 1907; it isn't a fascist invention. 'Why, in 1916,' the commandant continues, 'we listened to *Mussolini* plotting on the phone. The state is not

liberal or authoritarian by chance,' he pointedly notes. 'In twenty years, freedom will be back. I'll be retired and choose a party to vote for,' he smiles. That is the irony and the tragedy that *Black Holiday* paints for us with fine compassion and finer intelligence. It is an engrossing film about our own deaths, for we died with Rossini—in '36 and '48, in '54 and '56, in '65 and '68 especially, and in '72 as well. Like Rossini, we 'return day by day to our own habits, aided by our upbringing,' and that is the special tragedy of the enlightened middle class—in the Seventies as clearly as in the Thirties, trying 'to the very end,' as Leto says, 'to find ways of agreement, feigning not to understand that compromise is impossible.'

JAMES MONACO

Amarcord

Amarcord—I remember. All Fellini's films could be called that, one way or another. To such an extent that those who do not naturally turn on to Fellini, faults and all, have long since ceased even to complain about the endless succession of mountainous ladies, as menacing as they are sexually provocative, of visits to the seamy underside of show business in rundown circuses, tatty touring companies and fleapit cinemas, of *vitelloni* and aimless promenades among the dwarfs and freaks and eccentrics of which, it would seem, Italian provincial towns are full to overflowing, of sado-masochistic childhood encounters with organised religion. And indeed it is undeniable that by now we must all know Fellini's imaginative world inside out, or at least be familiar with every stick of his mental furniture.

The question, though, is what does he do with it on any given occasion? *Roma*, perhaps, contained nothing very new, but who could remain totally unaffected by the sheer brilliance and virtuosity with which Fellini assembled his materials, the relish with which he plunged into the camp-apocalyptic ecclesiastical fashion parade or the scarifying evocation of freeway chaos? Not to mention the whimsical charm of the passages summoning up his own childhood and his relationship with Rome as a myth. There were dull bits, mostly around the arrival of a teenage Fellini in the physical reality of Rome, but they could be overlooked or taken as a necessary leavening, lest the mixture prove over-rich. In the circumstances, then, the prospect of a new film which would continue the line of Fellini's discursive, first-person films of the last few years and go more extensively into his childhood recollections did seem tempting.

Alas, *Amarcord* (Columbia-Warner) does not live up to hopes. It is very much the mixture as before (which was to be expected), but Fellini somehow does not seem to be interested in doing much with the basic material to transform it. Compared with his other recent films, *Amarcord* is simple and classic to the point of self-denial. It resolves itself into a succession of scenes from provincial life, strung loosely round the experiences of Bobo, the representative of Fellini in the film, during the summer of 1935, aged about 15–16. In a sense, the film consists of nothing but set-pieces, but hardly anything is played up to the pitch of frenzy which usually seizes a Fellini film somewhere along the way. This seems to be very much Fellini playing it cool, toning down the extravagances, trying, heaven help us, to make a tasteful film. As *A Tale of Two Cities* is supposed to be the Dickens novel that those who don't like Dickens like, so one could conceive that *Amarcord* would be the Fellini film for so meone who normally hates Fellini.

But who really wants a tasteful, restrained Fellini? Inevitably, the bits of the film one remembers are those which come closest to the old reprobate Fellini we love or loathe according

'Black Holiday': arrival of the prisoners on the island



to taste. The nightmarish encounter with the gargantuan tobacconist lady, for instance, whom Bobo, greatly daring when he comes into her deserted shop to buy one cigarette at night, claims he can pick up and carry round. So, it proves, he can, and there follows a smothering, crushing embrace in which, like some earth-mother on the rampage, she ecstatically stuffs first one and then the other of her monstrous nipples into his dubiously receptive mouth. Or there is the sequence in which the family go to pick up a dotty uncle for a day out of the asylum, and he ends at the top of a tree calling desolately for a woman, until a midget nun comes to order him down.

Even these sequences, though, are disappointingly played down. It is as though there is something slightly faded and tired about the whole film, some indefinable lack of vitality which leaves it all looking a bit dusty and distant. There are moments when it comes suddenly, idiosyncratically to life. In the midst of one of the mildly predatory promenades around the town square, with the men eyeing the girls and the girls pretending they don't notice, people start coming out of the cinema, and a little old lady bustles straight up to the camera and observes, to us and to no one in particular, 'It was a lovely picture. I cried,' then darts away. In the country we observe a tiny child, about five perhaps, staggering along with a giant stone held high over his head, purposefully approaching a clothes-basket. As he is about to smash the stone down into it, his mother comes rushing up crying 'Assassino!', drives him away, and solicitously picks up the baby which is innocently sleeping in the basket. When it has snowed (shamelessly studio snow in a shamelessly studio set), everyone dashes out to see, and there, giving its harsh cry, is a peacock, superbly unconcerned, spreading its tail against the glittering white.

Strangest of all, and the only sustained passage where the film comes up with the old Fellini magic, is the sequence in which most of the town's population goes out at night in small boats to wait—but for what? The Rex, a super-liner which eventually moves majestically past like Leviathan, risen at last from the deep, or a mysterious creature from another planet. Its apparition has the effect of a sort of religious experience, with tears in the crowded congregation and all: the feeling is very close to that of the climactic appearance of the Pope in *Roma's* fashion parade. For just a few moments, Fellini catches us by attacking where he is strongest, at gut-level. We don't know exactly why we are moved, awed or whatever, but we are. Sad that in the rest of *Amarcord* we know all too clearly why we are not.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

Fear Eats the Soul

Like Rainer Werner Fassbinder's other recent imitations of life, *Fear Eats the Soul* (Cinegate) achieves a remarkable balance between stylisation and realism. The original, pidgin-German title—*Angst essen Seele auf*—is spoken early in the movie by Ali, a young Moroccan immigrant labourer, in an effort to relieve doubts in the mind of Emmi, the 60-year-old German widow who is beginning to fall in love with him. Without thinking, she corrects his grammar ('*Angst isst Seelen auf*') and then, not wishing to appear superior, asks if the phrase is a Moroccan saying. Ali misunderstands her question. 'Yes,' he says, 'that's how all Moroccans speak.' The sequence is a paradigm of Fassbinder's method and intentions. It's at once objective and engaged; it offers both a precise statement of the space (social, intellectual, experiential) between the odd couple, and a tender, non-partisan fidelity to the individual feelings of both characters.

The movie is an expansion/revision of a story



'Amarcord'

told by a minor character in Fassbinder's own *Der amerikanische Soldat* (1970), and also a remake/revision of Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (1955). Its plot is an extraordinary mesh of low-key melodrama and social criticism. Emmi meets Ali when she takes shelter in a bar frequented by Moroccans, Germany's most despised immigrants. To her surprise, her friendly overtures lead to a seduction and, soon after, to marriage; to her dismay, she is immediately ostracised by her neighbours, her three grown-up children, local tradesmen and her fellow-charwomen at work.

She averts a breakdown only by taking Ali for a holiday abroad. By the time they return to Munich, the social system has come to 'accommodate' the upset they caused (Emmi is needed: as a helping hand, a babysitter or a customer) and Emmi suddenly finds that she can command an 'audience' for her prize husband. Without noticing, she adopts a matriarchal role, and Ali drifts back to a voracious woman barkeeper who enjoys his virility at first hand. In a tenuously happy ending, Ali and Emmi are reconciled. Fassbinder's 1970 draft ended with Ali murdering Emmi in frustration, and the police unable to distinguish him from the city's other Moroccans (all called Ali too). The intervening years—and six features and a television series—have tempered that flip cynicism; they were also marked by Fassbinder's growing rapport with the work of Douglas Sirk.

Sirk's movies proposed aesthetically viable solutions to the problem of commenting radically on society without alienating audiences; the use of melodrama as a device for preserving a distance from the action—a distance conducive to analysis; the stylistic use of bold artifice (colour expressionism and other formal contrivances) as a means of reducing possible areas of ambiguity. In other words, Sirk offered a variety of subversion that proceeded through a measured, clear-cut seduction of the audience's susceptibilities. *Angst essen Seele auf* begins like a fairy-tale: as in a dream, Emmi is lured into the Moroccan bar by the Arab music on its juke-box, and invited to dance for what is evidently the first time in many years. Stage by stage, everything that follows is hilariously—and agonisingly—predictable; Fassbinder plays on audience expectations so thoroughly that his exposition astonishes by its very exhaustiveness. The types of racial fear and prejudice are catalogued succinctly: the woman neighbour's jealousy, the shopkeeper's self-deluding one-upmanship, the children's resentment, white workers'

contempt (Fassbinder himself contributes a sharp sketch of Emmi's layabout son-in-law). The ambience is such that even the one sane response to Emmi's marriage, from the landlord's son, is faintly sinister in its inscrutable courtesy.

The second half of the movie reverses the coin, and explores the equally rigid patterns of social exploitation that reassert themselves once everyone involved has adjusted to the broken taboo. Family and friends renew their old demands on Emmi's kindness and tolerance; Emmi joins her fellow chars in turning a blind eye to wage discrimination against a Yugoslav colleague, and begins treating Ali like a pet. Much, of course, hinges on sex. Ali is a terrific stud (Fassbinder twice shows him 'magnificently' naked) who provokes male envy and female lust, responses that the movie discovers behind nearly all the social façades. Throughout, the themes covert in the Jane Wyman-Rock Hudson relationship in *All That Heaven Allows* are made explicit, and ferociously convincing.

Fassbinder circumscribes the movie's area of interest by fading out on anything irrelevant to his direct concerns (the first night that the couple share; their turning-point holiday). He films his active characters in neutral mid-shots, never lending disproportionate weight to one or another in the compositions, and the legions of anonymous onlookers who provide the movie's moral 'context' in static, posed tableaux. The acting style he demands is just as artificial, using the hyper-realist, slow-paced diction familiar from his earlier work; Brigitte Mira and El Hedi Ben Salem draw from it performances of unerring psychological acuity. The overall approach invites comparison with other European critiques of American genres (Melville's gangster movies, Leone's Westerns); but Fassbinder is clearly as interested in vindicating Sirk as he is in using a rhetorical style to make his unequivocal statements on film. This 'politicised weepie' realises both aims with an assurance of a kind almost vanished from narrative cinema.

TONY RAYNS

Dirty Money

In *A Bout de Souffle*, Patricia interviews Jean-Pierre Melville (playing the author Parvulesco) and asks him to tell his greatest ambition in life. His response, 'Devenir immortel... et puis mourir,' came strongly to mind when

Melville died last year soon after the release in France of his last film, *Un Flic* (G.B.: *Dirty Money*). Of artistic immortality it is certainly too soon, and probably too presumptuous, to speak. Just as clear, however, is Melville's place in the pantheon of French cinema, as a spiritual father of the New Wave who created a body of markedly personal films which manage to bridge the usual gap between 'cinéma d'auteur' and popular commercial cinema.

Although one can trace his obsessive and constant themes back through his earliest films (adaptations of novels by Vercors, Cocteau and Beck), Melville's universe most clearly developed through his skilful manipulation of that tradition in the American film which he most admired as a spectator: the *policier* or urban crime drama. Perhaps he admired the genre so much because his own personal/artistic obsession (the solitude of men, and the barely submerged homosexual friendships between them as they engage in clashes of betrayal, honour and corruption), recurring characters (police, gangsters, cheap hoods), and the physical limitations of the world he envisioned (narrow rooms, furnished apartments and flashy nightclubs; in short *le milieu*), already comprised a major part of the genre's structure itself. Indeed, although Melville never failed to transform the impersonal material into a personal statement, it is impossible to see any of his last nine films without sensing echoes of *Dead End*, *The Big Heat* and Melville's own favourite, *The Asphalt Jungle*.

Strong thematic and visual links bind *Un Flic* (Columbia-Warner) to such predecessors as *Le Deuxième Souffle*, *Le Samourai* and *Le Cercle Rouge*, as well as to the American film tradition which fed and informed all Melville's work. Both plot and theme are clearly his: two friends, one a cop and the other a major drug dealer engaged in other illegal pursuits as well, must betray each other as much because they are mirror images of each other reflected in society's glass as because, in Melville's world (as he once put it), 'If there are two of you, one betrays.' The trap set by the cop Simon (Richard Crenna) for his criminal friend Edouard (Alain Delon) is a moral trap for himself. The shifting ambiguities of character and motivation consequently force one to suspend too easy judgment, for while each man is tied to the other through a 'community of interest', each man is also doomed and finally alone. Delon seems to move through a universe of heartless chrome and neon clubs, anonymously furnished apartments and nearly

empty city streets, neither touching nor being touched emotionally by anyone, including his sometime mistress Cathy (played well-nigh catatonically by Catherine Deneuve in a style appropriate to a world in which women rarely take a piece of the action).

The film is one more segment of his universe, and as such is valuable *per se*; but it must also be noted that *Un Flic* is one of Melville's weaker films, though it has strong virtues. The opening bank robbery, shot in suburban Paris in a driving rain, is as good as anything Melville ever did, including the robberies in *Deuxième Souffle* and *Cercle Rouge*. The rain drains the colour of its vibrancy and emphasises startlingly the gangsters in their black and grey coats and long black cars against the pale green empty spaces of the landscape. The alarm bell's klaxon and the sound of shots ring loudly in the desolate silence of the deserted suburb, so that sound and image work fully together to create the exact atmosphere for a tale of broken connections and solitude to come. Predominating greys, browns, pale blues and greens are judiciously blended to underscore that same atmosphere of frozen emotions, that same icy morality which made the almost speechless *Le Samourai* Melville's masterpiece.

His use of Delon in that earlier film was masterful also, in so far as he knew what to do with the glacial surface of the actor's face. With *Un Flic* this is less true, perhaps because Delon is called upon too often to speak, never his forte as an actor. Indeed, while Melville was well known for his ability to get the finest performances for his purposes from both his stars and character actors, he seems to have been unable to do much in this context with Richard Crenna, a failure which sets askew the film's inner balance. While Melville, evidently feeling that an external observation of action and behaviour can only enrich our understanding of the ambiguities of human nature, eschewed psychological realism in his creation of character, Crenna works against the method and continually breaks the surface with misplaced intensity.

It is, then, partially in at least one major characterisation, as well as in the rather banal and largely unnecessary dialogue (the English version is very serviceably dubbed), that the film seems to come apart and to lose that driving force which made one overlook minor faults in Melville's previous films. It is almost as if he had lost interest during the shooting; certainly the too obvious use of models during what

should have been an exciting train-helicopter encounter is evidence that the director (usually so painstaking with surface appearances) seems not to have cared enough about this one. Melville said, 'I am careful never to be realistic. . . What I do is false. Always.' But it is clear that he had in mind the creation of a believable but completely artificial alternate universe, rather than this film's unfortunate sloppiness of effect. Still, there remains that stunning first sequence, and enough richness of style and theme to make *Un Flic* a characteristic if not the quintessential Melville film.

DAVID L. OVERBEY

Cockfighter

The last few years have seen Monte Hellman—his small cult success having penetrated no further than the periphery of Hollywood—take off in Wellesian pursuit of the movie that will suit both the American and the European facets of his personality. The road has been littered with broken projects: *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, taken up by Peckinpah after producers had rejected Hellman as 'unmarketable'; reports of a collaboration with Alain Robbe-Grillet; and, most recently, the Hammer film *Shatter*, from which Hellman was fired, reputedly for turning out 'incomprehensible rushes'. Like Welles, it seems that Hellman is destined, more by the choices of others than by his own design, to become an underground film-maker.

With *Cockfighter* he returns to his beginnings as a director in the Roger Corman factory. That times have changed in that quarter is evident from the fact that *Cockfighter* looks as sleek an item—and almost as exploitable—as any of the company's recent work in the girl gang/prison revolt cycle, and far less bizarre than the two Westerns which Corman allowed Hellman to make, in hole-in-the-wall conditions, in 1966. At the same time, it is appropriate that Corman should be the one to find a way of marketing his protégé, and if *Cockfighter* is much 'straighter' than one might have expected, this is less a measure of how past films have been compromised than of how they have been telescoped and encapsulated.

Cockfighter is *Two-Lane Blacktop* not so much remade as reworked. The four-way split of the one existential dilemma in *Blacktop* has been tidied up here into the simple confrontation of one *macho* game-player, cockfighter Frank Mansfield (Warren Oates), with the execution of his chosen obsession. In the process, Hellman crosses the local dialects of films like *J. W. Coop* and *Junior Bonner*, and their fascination with the rewards of competition in similarly restricted rural arenas, with a perverse instinct for comedy of the absurd. Like *Two-Lane Blacktop*, *Cockfighter* travels down a lot of country roads, but its sense of landscape is almost non-existent—the terrain has become an abstract map, on which characters no less comically abstract mark out the positions and lines of play that define their identity.

To all intents and purposes, Frank Mansfield is the Warren Oates character from *Two-Lane Blacktop*, punished for his compulsive boasting and now as protectively reticent and self-controlled as the two young men he had hoped to leave in the dust of his fast-talking, fast-moving style. The opening shots of *Cockfighter* return us to the earlier film, and emphasise how far its cross-country race might have been a competition going on in the mind of one individual. Scenery is glimpsed drifting past the window of Mansfield's caravan; in an interior monologue, the cockfighter relates how he came to the sport and the fascination of being allied to 'something that'll fight to the death and not make a sound'; and then before Mansfield we see the girl friend, Dody, sitting beside him (Laurie Bird, the girl from *Blacktop* who was passed from car to car as additional baggage,

'Dirty Money': Alain Delon, Catherine Deneuve



until in an unspoken shift of the stakes she became the trophy that neither driver would admit to needing or prove capable of winning). In pursuit of a more accessible trophy, Mansfield travels the Tennessee-Georgia cockfighting circuit after the championship medal which he missed once before when an untimely boast led to the loss of his prize bird.

Now he has sworn not to talk until the medal is his, and although his lack of speech bothers no one else in the film, it is the subject of complaint in the first remark by Dody, who tells Mansfield that 'If you can talk when you're asleep, you can talk when you're awake.' The hero's unexplored dream might be linked to the flashback introduced later, showing his loud-mouthed self getting his comeuppance as his bird is fought to the death in bizarre slow motion on a plush square of hotel carpet. In a sense, for all the film's tightly edited displays of action in and around the tiny dirt arenas, Mansfield's real contest seems to be played out in the dream and the flashback—everything else being simply the enactment of his will. An absolute determinism is imposed by the strength of the hero's obsession, a determinism which ironically gives him freedom in all other concerns, be they material or emotional (gambling away his money, his trailer and Dody in the first bet he makes in the film; selling the house which he had given over to his sister and brother-in-law; and flatly stating in his letter to Mae Elizabeth, the girl back home whom he wishes to marry: 'We have got to make a decision about what to do with our lives'). Hellman fittingly drains all the props in this American dreamer's career of any emotive meaning or symbolic weight—Robbe-Grillet certainly seems no unlikely collaborator—and the film will probably be saved from commercial oblivion only by those carefully calculated sequences when it crosses the J. W. Coop school of picaresque adventure and bloody spectator sport.

Hellman has also emphasised the absurdist nature of the venture more pointedly than before. After the brief, ferocious encounters in the ring, encircled by straining faces, the camera pulls back bathetically to reveal the physical limits of the battleground where all the blood and effort have been expended. And Mansfield is seen throughout as only a very limited kind of hero. When Mae Elizabeth finally witnesses a cockfight, and is disgusted by the spectacle, she rounds on her suitor: 'I watched your face. No pity, no love, nothing. I think that chicken has more of a heart than you will ever have. He sure as hell has more of a voice.' The diatribe perhaps recalls an earlier scene when Mansfield is casually photographed by a tourist, and his picture comes out minus his head. With so few attributes to call his own, all Mansfield can do is reassert an obdurate will when Mae turns on her heel, and announce brightly to his partner, 'She loves me, Oscar,' before picking up his winnings and his medal.

RICHARD COMBS

Daisy Miller

The first and perhaps the final question to be asked about Peter Bogdanovich's adaptation of Henry James' novella is just why he chose to embark on it. A revealing interview with the director by Jan Dawson which appeared in *SIGHT AND SOUND* last winter affirms that he is anything but a Jamesophile ('The social aspects of it don't really concern me'), and one would imagine that taking up an admittedly minor—if commercially celebrated—work by the grey eminence would at least be dictated by an interest in the tale as 'raw material', an expedient for arriving at his own creation. But the confounding thing about his *Daisy Miller* (CIC) is that it comes across as neither fish nor fowl: too indifferent to Jamesian nuance to qualify as appreciation, too faithful (in terms of the overall plotting and dialogue in Frederic Raphael's



'Cockfighter': Warren Oates

script) to gain credence as an attack on the original—and yet too amorphous and uncertain in its own terms to register as an independent and autonomous work.

One suspects that the attractions of the project were the mythic elements: American innocence and charm in confrontation with European decadence. In James' terms, the contrast is centrally defined by the viewpoint of Winterbourne, a Europeanised American who, by his own rueful admission, has 'lived too long in foreign parts', and who oscillates uneasily between the more snobbish sense of propriety of his aunt Mrs. Costello and the haughty Mrs. Walker (both Americans) and his infatuation with the flirtatious appeal of Daisy, who spends her own time abroad in defiance of the local social mores, before tragically dying of Roman fever incurred by her insistence on visiting the Colosseum by moonlight. The comic paradox of Daisy's collision with 'European society' is that all the central characters are Americans (excepting only the pathetic Giovanelli, an Italian bumpkin whose appearances with Daisy cause most of the scandals); and the tensions mainly seem to derive from their varying degrees of self-consciousness about their European surroundings, with Vevey and Rome serving as the crucial backdrops.

The social customs which Daisy flouts are defined by James' milieu circa 1878, and the mere reproduction of them in a contemporary work obviously leads to difficulties that must be circumvented either by irony or the precise decision to treat the original as a period piece. Bogdanovich's approach falls somewhere in between these solutions, treating Winterbourne's vacillations—and Mrs. Walker's climactic snubbing of Daisy at a social gathering—as though they were as ambiguous and abnormal as the heroine's own behaviour, and rendering the relationship between Winterbourne and Daisy almost exclusively as a failed love story.

Clearly what the film requires in order to skirt this thin ice is a solid sense of history; what is mainly offered in its place is a sense of movie history, and pretty familiar survey material at that. However much *Targets* and *The Last Picture Show*, Bogdanovich's first two films, may have relied on the work of other directors, one generally felt that these were being used as stylistic guidelines, not as life preservers. Working for the first time without the talents of Polly Platt as production designer, in a period and on a continent where he has to

depend more on intuition than experience, Bogdanovich appears to have sought the examples of his mentors more strenuously than before.

The results are sad indeed: what seems intended as an evocation of *The Magnificent Ambersons* comes much closer to the disjointedness of *The Trial*, but without the exuberance or the experimental inventiveness that animated Welles' own miscalculation. Stationing a plaintive sounding harmonica player in the vicinity of Daisy and Winterbourne's castle visit at Chillon—and then reprising his tune over the final credits—comes across as a case of misapplied Ford to telegraph a mood of nostalgia. And having Cybill Shepherd as Daisy race through her opening dialogue like some amalgamation of a Hawks heroine and a field-track runner merely bypasses the material instead of confronting it. (Matters are not helped much by Cybill Shepherd's inflections: persuasive as a Texas tease in *The Last Picture Show* and more than adequate, under Elaine May's expert direction, as a Minnesota wish-fulfilment in *The Heartbreak Kid*, she is scarcely believable at all when she impersonates Daisy in an accent a good thousand miles south of Schenectady.)

Most of the trouble throughout amounts either to reductionism of this sort or overcalculation. The potentially hilarious lines of Randolph—Daisy's philistine younger brother whose various outrages are often heightened versions of her own—are usually derailed by the decision to direct him as a conventional Hollywood brat. 'I never saw anything so pretty,' Daisy remarks of the Colosseum in the original; substituting 'quaint' for 'pretty' tends to make her innocence seem more moronic than charming.

Even an intrinsically good idea, like the last shot—the camera drawing away from Winterbourne (Barry Brown) at Daisy's funeral while we hear the subsequent dialogue between him and his aunt—is marred by a freeze-frame and a whitening out of the image, simplicity quickly losing out to overkill. Original locations traversed with Lubitsch-like discretion or glimpsed from Wellesian low-angle shots (to suggest fatality) are unfortunately not enough; and as the film progresses one becomes increasingly grateful for the quiet authority of Mildred Natwick's Mrs. Costello, suggesting more of James' world in single lines than the remainder of the film in all its exertions.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

Edinburgh 1974

from page 231

and a more compelling movie subject than the Hesse entry, Nicholas Ray prowls through a documentary that takes its title from a line of dialogue in *Johnny Guitar* and Ray's own claim that 'the working title of every film is *I'm a Stranger Here Myself*.' He is described as a tyrant and a manipulator by one of his students at Binghamton College, where Ray was engaged on the apparently never-ending communal project of *We Can't Go Home Again*, while François Truffaut talks of the 'European sensitivity of this man from Hollywood' and Ray's vulnerability elsewhere garners the comment: 'Each project he undertakes might be likened to the blind run in *Rebel Without a Cause*.' For all its roughness, and the occasional awkward passage in the commentary, David Halpern's portrait does justice to a complicated figure. More rudimentary, though more lavishly budgeted, is Richard Schickel's *Raoul Walsh*, a supporting document to the

Festival's extensive Walsh retrospective that simply extracts a few wild anecdotes from the genial veteran and links together clips from his films with a commentary that dips outrageously into the purple. The battleground of *What Price Glory?* is 'a landscape blasted into surreality,' and the same film's affecting moments of male camaraderie are described as 'perfectly placed punctuation marks in paragraphs full of action verbs.'

Far from the overheated Esalen atmosphere of many of the new films, in Transylvania-on-the-Potomac, *The Werewolf of Washington* confirmed Edinburgh's talent for unearthing neglected gems in the American cinema. Made last year, before the recent Presidential drama had reached its final act, the film wittily accommodates the most standard of werewolf plots to the tangle of Watergate, with teasing references to real personages, whose names have been changed, etc. Finely written and directed by Milton Moses Ginsberg, who spins an elegant design out of a low budget, *Werewolf* could well be the *Dr. Strangelove* of

Watergate.

Equally, *Dark Star* is 2001 as it might have been, had Kubrick maintained the *Strangelove* mood. The work of two recent USC film school graduates, John Carpenter and Dan O'Bannon, the film is remarkable for the sophistication of its science-fiction effects and enjoyable for its extravagant comedy—the varsity-revue humour perfectly appropriate to the spaced-out, hung-up mentalities of the crew members of the galactic wanderer, 'Dark Star'. The climax has man undone, philosophically as well as technologically, by his machines, and as one spaceman is ecstatically carried away by a band of glowing asteroids, another rides a piece of flotsam like a surfboard into the broiling atmosphere of a nearby planet. The comic-strip ending is tinged with the epiphany of one of the stories in Bradbury's *Illustrated Man* collection, in which an astronaut suffers a similar fate; on earth, a small boy watches what he takes to be the fall of a shooting star, and his mother whispers, 'Make a wish.'

RICHARD COMBS

Elisabeth Lutyens

from page 205

the soundtrack but with music) and perhaps there is somebody wounded and you want to illustrate his thoughts. You can do this by some instrument—pianissimo on close mike—with the shindy going on behind. There are many contemporary musical experiments and sound effects thought to be 'new' which were done in the film studios forty years or so ago.

How about using music to establish locale and period in a film?

There are certain obvious ways. For instance, the guitar in Spain, goes to Mexico, crosses the border to become cowboy music—you can hear how that music changes and you learn the history and geography. Sometimes you have to put people into costume, perhaps a ballroom scene in 19th century Russia or in 20th century Paris; accordion music, perhaps, and knowing that the French accordion is different from the German—you've got to get that type of tune dead on... I once did a film where Rievaulx Abbey appeared—the ruin—and they wanted me to give the impression that the monks were still living in it. Now, you can play a piece of genuine 14th century music, but very often to 20th century ears it doesn't sound as 14th century as a slight pastiche of it would do. I did the radio music for Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, which is a sort of 16th century *I.T.M.A.* (the Third Programme was rather apt to choose plays in costume depending on ghosts and pickpockets whom you couldn't see). There was a little time over, and I orchestrated a contemporary dance tune called 'La Volta' by William Byrd—and 'La Volta' is a gay dance. I didn't say anything, but the producer said, 'Oh, I think all the music is fine except for that sequence, which to me sounds "churchy".' (Because it was in a mode with a minor third, which, in the last two hundred years, has become 'churchy' or Modely-Wodely to modern ears.) It just shows that we

cannot listen with the ears of the period because our ears have changed.

Of which of your film scores are you most proud?

I've forgotten *all* of them! I've forgotten what I did last week. One distinguished composer said to me years ago that he'd never forgotten one single note of anything he'd written. I remember thinking, 'Now, come on Lizzy, forget *instantly*,' because I'd heard some of his works and thought, 'The sooner forgotten, the better!'. . .

I'm not at all ashamed of any of the film music. I did my best for the films, although I don't think all of it was successful. I remember that not long ago I did a score for the film *The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* where I only had eight players. This was difficult. I wanted to keep back the organ for that repulsive picture 'The Light of the World' by Holman Hunt—that left me seven instruments. The film had one long sequence of a picture by Millais, the whole point of which was that you saw the drawing and then the colour. I'd had all this given to me in the cue sheets but found that the band was too small for such differentiation. Had it been a bigger orchestra, I could perhaps have had strings for the drawing and brass for the colour—I think that particular sequence was a flop on my part. Some of the most difficult films to do are art films.

Do you have much control over the dubbing of your music?

I've only been to one dubbing session and I felt it was monumentally boring. I think some composers feel that, if I really cared for the music, I should go and see that it had priority over the sounds of birds or whatever. I really think that, if a producer has chosen (and paid) a composer and got the music he wanted, he would use it. If they are too stupid and unimaginative, my going there and rowing is not going to make them less stupid or less unimaginative.

Are you usually at the first performances of your works so that you can advise on interpretation?

I'm always at the music recording session of films. Very often it's in the contract that you have to be. It is the thing that really interests me—that's when you see whether or not you've brought it off. Of course, very often at the first take everything is out of sync, so that you see the girl being stabbed and the stab music comes a second late. There is a 'ticker' on the screen so that as well as the picture you have all the seconds marked.

Have you ever created themes by doodling at the piano?

Sometimes. When I'm given a film score I may try out ideas on the piano. Before being given a film score in 1944 I was allowed—as a 'woman'—to write a two-minute march for the WAAFs for the RAF magazine film *Gen*. (It would be easier to write for sailors!) I called the piece 'Bustle for WAAFs', in reference to early film titles and the unfortunate contours of the uniforms those poor girls had to wear. This I did find difficult. What *is* a march for WAAFs, as compared to any other march? I tried out ideas and scrapped them instantly time and again, and by this trial and error I did, I think, finally hit it. It made an impression as uproariously funny when first played by the famous Uxbridge orchestra that included some of our finest players—Dennis Brain and Norman del Mar were two of the horn players.

Has writing for films in any way aided your recognition as a composer?

I don't think either world—film or concert—has much cognisance of the other. Perhaps being known as a 'film composer' invites odium in the concert world. Equally, being known in the concert world might gain one a reputation as being 'too highbrow' in the film world. One cannot possibly assess one's own position. Personally, I'm very grateful for the experience that writing for films has given me. So much music I hear in the concert hall I feel to be 'film music' (and to a bad film!). Writing for films would avoid this. ■

© Elisabeth Lutyens and Jeffery Kemp, 1974

BOOK REVIEWS

THE LONG VIEW

By Basil Wright

SECKER AND WARBURG, £6.25

I treasure the memory of a quite unprintable critical study, written in 1950 by one Stephen Dragpole, of a one-eyed Bessarabian (or possibly Macedonian) film director, Vladimir Schwindel. Somehow or other the reprehensible private escapades of Schwindel were interpreted in relation to his art, and particularly his major discovery of Concealed Cutting (or *montage in absentia*), developed through his celebrated 'Ust' trilogy (*Rust*, 1923; *Lust*, 1924 and *Bust*, 1925). The essay included an extended analysis of the central scene in *Nitt*, in which 'Natasha (surely Prognostika's greatest role) peers into the cradle and sees not her baby, but an unknown lobster'; and ended with the triumph of Schwindel's war reportage, *Rocks* (in America retitled *What a Picnic!*) and the director's preparations for his Festival of Britain documentary.

The name 'Stephen Dragpole' in fact concealed the identity of Basil Wright; and a quite passionate satirical purpose, aimed at overweening pretension in critics as well as film-makers, underlay this jolly bit of nonsense. A quarter of a century on, Basil Wright is no dragpole. Uncompromisingly personal, uncompromisingly modishness or *a priori* rules of critical theory, passionate in their enthusiasms and good-natured in their dislikes, the 700 pages of *The Long View* are some of the most attractive writing on the cinema you are likely to find.

He does not pretend to offer a comprehensive one-man history (which at this stage of the game, with so much vanished and so appallingly much more remaining, is impossible), but rather the history of a lifetime's devotion to the art. Surprisingly (because he is still one of the youngest people imaginable, regardless of what *Who's Who* says), he can lay claim to sixty years of picture-going.

He has watched most of it happening. More important, his recall reckons not only facts but feelings. His record is infused with the youthful joy at Keaton; the student's excited discovery of the German and Soviet silents; the indignation and heart searching at the coming of sound; the discovery of new worlds and possibilities with Grierson. (You never forget that he is a film-maker as

well.) What is specially remarkable is that after sixty years of his responses and enthusiasm are quite unjailed. He can still go to the cinema with an open mind and open heart and none of that terror of being emotionally taken in that inhibits (for instance) Miss Kael, who is one of the many critics he quotes frequently and approvingly.

Not that he is without prejudices, but he makes no bones about them. He admits before he starts that he is unequipped to write about Antonioni and Bergman ('Heaven knows,' he sighs, 'I have tried hard enough'). He has fewer qualms about Warhol, who 'bamboozles audiences into acceptance of his shabby renderings of camp, transvestism, casual porn and, above all, inactivity.' Godard is more of a problem; Basil Wright sees him as a brilliant creator and a seminal influence, but 'it is annoying that his genius also demands his preoccupation with other matters—existentialism, Maoism and a general desire to interfere.'

If there is a deception in the book it is in its rather formal division into chronological sections (each introduced by a collage or montage of events in the cinema and across the world in a particular year). The View is as broad as it's long; and one thing leads to another, because Basil Wright has above all the film-maker's ability to connect. He will take off into a digression, bringing together for instance the history of the treatment of children in films. He will flash forwards and flash back across a director's career. Resnais can lead on to Bresson and Bresson invites a comparison with Dreyer and Melville is brought in by *Léon Morin, Prêtre*. It keeps you on your toes; the general feeling is of being taken for a series of vigorous sightseeing hikes by a favourite uncle.

However energetic (and you have to pick up some difficult allusions, cinematic and literary, from time to time), it is fairly irresistible, with lots of treats on the way, among them the writer's nice way with a colloquialism and his ear for little jokes (like the critic Reinhardt's *Midsummer Night's Dream* who wrote 'I am not very keen on Cagney's Bottom').

And so frankly personal a view leaves everyone's options open. The reader—the treated nephew—is quite at liberty to dispute the critical views (*The Informer* Ford's

best film, and *Death in Venice* Visconti's?), the balance (there is quite a lot about the cinema of the Low Countries, while Germany in the 1930s is dismissed as 'only kitsch' after *Drei von der Tankstelle* and *Congress Dances*), the omissions (which include Borzage, more or less, Christensen, Fejos and Tashlin).

The occasional slips are a bit different. Certainly one would not have wished the free flow of Basil Wright's massive narrative, the length and largeness of his grand view, hamstrung with pedantic irrelevances; but he should have had a researcher to save him from needless blunders, such as that Edison changed the name of the Kinetograph to Kinetoscope (one, as the name implies, was the camera, the other the projector), or that the 'synchronised language versions of the 1930s were soon abandoned' (they lasted for several years and produced such excellences as the French *Dreigroschenoper* and Feyder's German versions of *La Kermesse Héroïque* and *Gens du Voyage*), or the idea of *The Heart of the Matter* as a Russian classic.

There are others too, but they don't really matter, in relation to the intensity of the pleasure and the experience Basil Wright has derived from his art, and his skill in communicating it.

DAVID ROBINSON

HOLLYWOOD, ENGLAND: The British Film Industry in the Sixties

By Alexander Walker

MICHAEL JOSEPH, £5.50

There have only been two really important decades in the history of the British cinema, the Forties and the Sixties, and the latter is perhaps the more significant of the two. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, and all the rest of those delightful Dickensian antinomies. And indeed as Alexander Walker tells the story it was a tale of two mythical cities: the nomadic Hollywood, which pitched camp in Britain on its way home to America, and 'Swinging London'.

Dean Acheson once offended half a nation by saying that Britain had lost an Empire without finding a role. At last it seemed that we had found one as the new pace-setters in style, popular culture and mass entertainment. Briefly London became the global leisure capital. Only slightly less briefly, our film industry became the cynosure of the world, and movie-making dollars flowed in as never before.

Under John Trevelyan censorship restrictions gradually eased. Anderson, Richardson, Reis, Yates, Schlesinger, Boorman, Lester, Russell, Gold emerged as feature directors; Losey, Truffaut, Godard, Kubrick, Polanski, Chaplin worked here. Between *Saturday Night* and *Sunday Morning*, the highwater-mark of provincial realism in 1960, and

Performance, the most singular achievement of metropolitan fantasy in 1970, there appeared the majority of the best films ever produced in this country. To keep this claim in perspective, however, one should say that no year saw the production of more than a dozen British movies that it would have been a major cultural impoverishment to have missed.

But as the decade drew to a close our perennially crisis-ridden industry was in even worse shape than the nation itself. Native audiences had been falling steadily and the number of cinemas dropped from 3,400 in 1959 to under 1,500 in 1970—the actual movie-going situation in Britain is worse than that of almost any other country in Europe and America. The American money faded away, studios closed, serious unemployment was once more experienced. Despite all the pictures that had been made, no tradition of film-making had been created. About the only things we can now rely on are inferior horror movies, inept soft-core porn and inefficient television spin-offs.

Introducing his survey of the decade, Alexander Walker acknowledges a debt to Bernard Levin's *Pendulum Years* and Christopher Booker's *The Neophiliacs* for breaking the ground and giving him perspective on the Sixties. Fortunately, however, his study lacks the strident egotism, authorial superiority and apocalyptic thrust of those earlier books, and while there is plenty of sharp criticism and cogent argument, no easy conclusions are forced upon us. Moreover *Hollywood, England* is not written solely from a seat in the stalls or the BFI library (though Walker is of course a stranger to neither), but is based on well-digested interviews with dozens of film-makers.

Their evidence is used to create casebooks on various aspects of production—the Bond business, the making of *The Servant* and *Tom Jones*, Shenson and the Beatles, the Bryanston, Woodfall and British Lion stories, etc. Certain key figures emerge—Lindsay Anderson, for example, who sets the scene and hovers over Walker's shoulder like Dr. Leavis; Bryan Forbes, a man of probity but always an actor, done in by bad luck, uncooperative businessmen, envious colleagues, the studio system, and his own 'cautious insularity'; George H. Ornstein, merely a name to me hitherto, the ubiquitous London-based American tycoon who was at United Artists when *Tom Jones*, *Dr. No* and *A Hard Day's Night* were backed, at Paramount when *If...* was in production, and at Warner Brothers for *Performance*; Tony Richardson, who's given more credit than he usually receives nowadays for getting on with the job and creating an *œuvre*, and also for generously arranging opportunities for others.

There are plenty of fools in Walker's book. Among them are the crass, short-sighted distributors

and circuit owners, and the politicians of both parties who over the past thirty years have shown a total absence of commercial, cultural and political imagination when it comes to dealing with the film industry. On the other hand there are few villains, and the last people to be blamed for our plight are the Americans. The title page epigraph is from the little red book of Tony Garnett and runs: 'To be an Englishman in the film industry is to know what it's like to be colonised.' But Walker's sermon is the gentlest, fairest gloss upon this text.

The Americans were here trying to encourage us to be ourselves, positively thrusting a new national identity upon us, and no doubt that was one of the troubles. Just look at the dozen movies in Universal's \$30 million British programme of 1966-68: pictures by Albert Finney, Peter Watkins, Jack Gold, Peter Hall, Chaplin, Losey, not a Swinging London flick or slick mid-Atlantic package among them, nearly every one a personal film, all worth making, and all box-office failures of various degrees of magnitude. Walker quotes the so regretful, though Tony Garnett might rightly think highly indicative, words of Walter Shenson as summing up the way many American film-makers feel about Britain today:

'It is a low profile country now. Still a lovely place to live, no longer any place for a film-maker to work. For an American, it is impossible to make a film reflecting the British scene—there just is no scene today. This place no longer makes news that is of interest to the world. When society is under stress or going through change, the outlines of what's happening are unfamiliar and exciting and the artists are under pressure to react to it all. When we are over-familiar with what has been happening, all that is left is a hangover.'

Hollywood, England is a lengthy book, but not a comprehensive treatment of the British cinema. We hear little for example of David Lean (presumably because he was working in Hollywood,

Spain) or Kubrick (fully dealt with in Walker's 1971 monograph). I should like to have had some notes on the industrially (and industriously) significant Michael Winner, who's mentioned in passing in the text but not in the index, and also on Mike Sarne who—God help us—made a sufficiently strong impact on Hollywood with *Joanna* that the red carpet was unrolled for him when he arrived there to direct *Myra Breckinridge*.

But these are cavils in the face of a most valuable and informative book that has deliberately chosen to consider in depth two major interlocking movements. The first was the glum post-austerity pictures of working-class and lower middle-class life that followed on the success of *Room at the Top* in 1959; these drew their inspiration from literature and the theatre. The second was the cinema of affluence, of *joie de vivre*, that followed it, starting roughly with *Tom Jones* in 1963, and including the Bond pictures, Lester's movies, the 'Swinging London' cycle; these drew very heavily on the visual arts, television and pop culture, as well as the French cinema.

Like others before him, Walker sees *Billy Liar* (1963) as a turning point, with the movie-makers themselves leaving Billy behind them and taking the train down to London with the free-wheeling Liz (Julie Christie), the harbinger of *Time's* 'Swinging London'. I agree with him, and seeing Schlesinger's picture again the other day (it stands up surprisingly well) I was struck by several things. One is that Billy's story is told against a background of a society in which everything is being physically transformed without any apparent reference to or consideration for him, and without him being aware of it. This gives the film a different resonance from the one it had at the time. The other is that the film's most frequently repeated fantasy—Billy mowing down his tormentors with a machine-gun—now instantly brings to mind Anderson's *If...*, which in turn makes one think of Pál Gábor's recent

Horizon, whose sad Budapest teenage hero sits through Anderson's movie twice to savour the final sequence.

Symbolic gestures of violence expressing characters' ineradicable frustrations might well be seen as one of the great recurrent features of the British cinema, from Arthur Seaton throwing a stone at the new housing estate in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* to Lindsay Anderson striking Malcolm McDowell with the script at the end of *O Lucky Man*!

PHILIP FRENCH

HOLLYWOOD AND AFTER

By Jerzy Toeplitz

Translated by Boleslaw Sulik

ALLEN AND UNWIN, £4.50

Among the surfeit of cinema books still the vogue among publishers here and in America, a work by Professor Jerzy Toeplitz must command prompt and full consideration. In 1945 he was the co-founder and for almost twenty years Head of the Polish National Film School at Lodz, which begat such directors of repute as Wajda and Polanski. Subsequently he lectured in many countries, including India and Latin America, and came to observe the American film scene at first hand in the Fifties and Sixties. He was also President of the International Federation of Film Archives for nearly twenty-five years and is now Director of the newly founded Australian National Film School. This is an impressive record in cinema history. He has written several previous film books which have not been translated into English; the one under review is the first of his work to be put into English by way of, I see it said, an Italian translation. This perhaps makes for some odd and turgid phraseology.

A survey of the whole reconstruction of financial power in Hollywood, the change in and sometimes abolition of studio control and ownership, forms a useful early section of the book, and Toeplitz's final round-up of so-called American underground cinema in the past two decades is helpful, although his judgment of some films in this area is not always valid. There is also a chapter dealing with new technological processes in the visual-aural fields of electronics. At the same time, it should be said that it all appears very much a scissors-and-paste job (as they used to call it in the cut-out wallpaper patterns in the Nineties). There is little original critical appreciation of postwar Hollywood films, which is disappointing from a critic and historian of such reputation. A great deal more care could have been given to the choice of stills, many being all too familiar to cinema book addicts. Do we really need such old-hat photographs of Liz Taylor in *Cleopatra*, Gable and Vivien Leigh in *Gone with the Wind*, Sinatra in *The Detective*, McDowell in *A Clockwork Orange*

and Brando in *The Godfather*? They have all been used *ad nauseam*. I suggest that Professor Toeplitz has drawn widely from the files of *Variety*, the *New Yorker* and *Newsweek* for some of his information. Nevertheless, although I wish that it could be more fully recommended, this is a better cinema book than many that are newly around the shelves. It is in the expensive bracket for students, which is a pity.

PAUL ROTH

FROM REVERENCE TO RAPE: The Treatment of Women in the Movies

By Molly Haskell

HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON, NEW YORK, \$10.00

From Reverence to Rape is a large and aphoristic tome whose incisive wit is only occasionally matched by a sense of humour. It is an infuriating book, insofar as its author tends every so often to lapse from her own dauntingly high standards of literacy and intelligence. But at least it is also infuriating in the best sense: provocative and eminently readable. Never more than in its frequent departures from the dispassionate investigation promised by its subtitle. For parallel to the scholarly development of a thesis—that the screen image of women has been sliding downhill for the past thirty-five years—there runs a second volume, compounded in equal parts of gloomy prognosis and Ms.-ianic vision. Of the two, it is not the less interesting.

Through her analysis of the shortcomings of most celluloid unions, Ms. Haskell builds up a portrait of the ideal marriage, a Platonic picture in perhaps more senses than one. The two partners, separate but equal, 'are respectively engaged in stimulating activities, [can] feel self-reliant, and share a sense of mutual growth.' Not for them the fashionable 'emphasis on orgasmic bliss.' Ideally the wife will be flat-chested (breasts being 'features designed so explicitly to imprison her in her role as woman and mother') and childless ('the sacrifice of and for children is a disease passing for a national virtue'). Despite the passage between husband and wife of a 'constant current of energy and electricity', the mode to which they aspire will be one of relaxed sensuality tempered by puritanism. For crucial to Ms. Haskell's arguments is the conviction that: 'If puritanism is the source of our greatest hypocrisies and most crippling illusions, it is, as the primary anxiety whose therapy is civilisation itself, the source of much, perhaps most, of our achievement.'

Small wonder then that the Thirties are acclaimed as the Golden Age of screen relationships. Just as the working woman emerges from the social evils of the Depression, so the articulate heroine grows out of the pro-

'Billy Liar': Liz (Julie Christie) en route to Swinging London



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WITH EISENSTEIN IN HOLLYWOOD

by Ivor Montagu

1974 reprint of Seven Seas Paperback. 358pp. 16pp photographs. Notes and bibliography. Ref 4405 65p.

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COLLINS

scriptions of the Production Code; and with her, 'romantic comedies in which love is disguised as antagonism and sexual readiness as repartee.' The 50-50 screen partnerships of Hepburn and Tracy, Rosalind Russell and Cary Grant, Bogart and Bacall achieve a state of grace from which the cinema will subsequently fall (though Ms. Haskell's paradigm is sufficiently elastic to accommodate her admiration for Dietrich, Mae West, Lubitsch, and even an ingenious feminist defence of Howard Hawks' machismo).

With the Forties, sexual antagonism becomes a reality rather than a pretence (praise for Kukor, Ophuls, Sirk, but no points for John Huston). The Fifties are despised as the zenith of both anti-intellectualism and distortion: a decade of sexless films about sex. And since then, women depicted as ever less intelligent, sensual, humorous or extraordinary, mere way-stations in the heroes' pursuit of adventure, fulfilment or self-destruction. Though it's hard to resist the image of Newman and Redford 'on their way to becoming the Myrna Loy/William Powell of the Seventies,' Ms. Haskell's judgments of the postwar period seem often to stop on the wrong side of charity or common sense: her refusal to see beyond Billy Wilder's surface tastelessness or the imprisoning protuberances of Ms. Monroe's breasts; her admiration for the Doris Day persona as 'a home-grown existentialist female.'

The book's weakest section is its chapter on Europe, where Ms. Haskell's movie-going impressions can no longer be bolstered by her shrewd, off-screen observations. She concentrates on the postwar period, with the continent treated rather as a single, homogenous kingdom whose princesses are tyrannised by Svengalian auteurs. Bertolucci is singled out for allowing women 'to surrender to their sexual fantasies and emerge with their souls intact,' but Godard and Bergman are both tersely castigating—the first for misogyny, the second for homocentricity—while proof of Truffaut's destructive idealism is unpleasantly found in the fact that two of his leading actresses later died in car crashes. Preminger rates higher on the scorecard than either Bresson or Dreyer, because he sees Joan of Arc as rebel rather than martyr. The Third World is even more summarily dismissed, for failing to produce emancipated heroines; yet surely to a writer who has observed in the American context that 'the real gap is cultural and economic rather than sexual,' this should come as no surprise.

Molly Haskell's strength is as an observer of her own and her country's attitudes, and she achieves a kind of intellectual sublimity whenever the two coincide. Her limitation is perhaps that she responds more fully to movies which reflect her own image than to those which challenge it.

JAN DAWSON (Ms.)

Letters

Don't Look at the Camera

SIR,—Harry Watt was a memorable film-maker. Who could think of the North Sea and its trawlers, without honouring his craftsmanship or remembering John Taylor? Elizabeth Sussex has reviewed his book *Don't Look at the Camera* in your last issue with her customary grace and perceptiveness. She detects an apparent lack of intellectual ability, and a failure to sense the larger issues. She is, however, wrong to suggest that his comments on his colleagues are cruel. They are only irrelevant, inaccurate, and oddly tasteless.

If a less secure background could have inspired the patrician Basil Wright to pack more poetry into the enduringly poetic *Song of Ceylon*, more creative film criticism into *World Film News*, or more creative scholarship into *The Long View*, one wonders how.

If Stuart Legg was ever dull, one wonders when. How have we endured his unremitting and explosive virtuosity, his dazzling and scholarly commentaries, his daring and nerve-wracking cutting, and his mordant sense of fun?

If Arthur Elton 'obviously disliked people', he had the good manners not to say so in print. One would have thought him affectionate enough about the people in *Housing Problems*. He was extravagantly devoted to Alex Wolcough, Sir Stephen Tallents, Sir Michael Balcon, and Jack Beddington. He loved Reg Jacob and John Grierson, and not without reason.

Harry Watt may well be advised to leave the judgment of his colleagues to his betters. John Grierson, with unexpected humility, left it to Edgar Anstey, and rightly so. After Edgar Anstey, and Basil Wright's elegant summing up, we can safely leave it to Andrew Holmes. As Grierson used to say: 'Oh Truth, More First Than Sun, More Last Than Stars.'

Yours faithfully,
MARGARET ANN ELTON
Clevedon, Somerset

Max Wall

SIR,—I am helping with research for comedian Max Wall's autobiography and hope also to arrange for the production of a television documentary of his career. Mr. Wall's work has been mainly in the theatre but he has made several film appearances. Two subjects I am anxious to view in any form, in case extracts can be included, are: *On the Air* (British Lion, 1934), a musical revue featuring

Roy Fox's band and several variety acts including Max Wall. Director was Herbert Smith and running time 78 minutes; and *Come Dance with Me* (Columbia British, 1950), a musical with Gordon Humphris, Yvonne Marsh, Anne Shelton and Max Wall. Producer/Director was Mario Zampi and running time 58 minutes.

Any advice or further information your readers may be able to give would be much appreciated. I am also interested in seeing publicity matter.

Yours faithfully,
MICHAEL POINTON

Kiln Studio,
Watermill,
Benenden, Cranbrook,
Kent.

G-Men

SIR,—I see from Tom Milne's review (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1974) that *Dillinger* implies that Machine-Gun Kelly coined the term G-man. Maud Gonne's autobiography records that in the 1890s Dubliners used the name G-men for the (British) agents who kept watch on (Irish) nationalists. It looks as if Kelly didn't coin it but imported it.

Yours faithfully,
BRIGID BROPHY
London, S.W.5.

TV Strategies

SIR,—May I correct an error in my article on 'TV Strategies and European Film Production'. Between 1960 and 1970, the German television networks financed film production by German companies with some 840 million DM and not 400 million DM as stated. In addition, the networks invested a further 440 million DM in films produced by companies financially associated with them.

Yours faithfully,
VINCENT PORTER
The Polytechnic of Central
London.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

GILBERT ADAIR teaches English in Paris, and has written poetry and film criticism. . . THOMAS R. ATKINS is chairman of the Theatre Arts Department at Hollins College, Virginia, and editor-publisher of *The Film Journal*. . . EDGARDO COZARINSKY is an Argentinian critic and film-maker, director of the film . . . (*Points of Suspension*) which was shown at the London Festival in 1971. . . JEFFERY KEMP has published educational music and teaches film appreciation at a large secondary school in Brighton. . . JEROME KUEHL was associate producer on Thames Television's *World at War* series and is now working on a series about European mass emigration to the USA; has taught history at university level and was for five years a member of the European Production Unit of NBC. . . MARTIN WALSH teaches film history and criticism at the University of Western Ontario and is doing research on Godard, Straub and Makavejev.

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TMS FILM for *Karl May*.
HUNGAROFILM for *25 Fireman's Street*.
THE N'W FILM GROUP AND TELEFILM, IRAN for *Still Life*.
FILMVERLAG DER AUTOREN for *Alice in the Cities*.
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FILM GUIDE

**AMARCORD

(Columbia-Warner)
Fellini remembers fantasies and invents memories in a small town companion piece to *Roma*. Broader than anything the director has attempted in years, with peaks of invention separated by raucous valleys of low comedy, leavened throughout with an archetypally sweet and winsome Nino Rota score. (Magali Noël, Armando Brancia, Pupella Maggio.) Reviewed.

**BLACK HOLIDAY

(The Other Cinema)
Attractively muted drama of politics and conscience, set in an island detention centre for opponents of the Mussolini regime. The hero, a donnish anti-fascist, finally rejects the special relationship offered him by the governor, and the film tempers didacticism with adult irony. (Adolfo Celi, Adalberto Maria Merli; director, Marco Leto.) Reviewed.

*BLACK WINDMILL, THE

(CIC)
Apart from odd moments, curiously aberrant after Siegel's recent run of fine, skin-tight movies. A flaccid spy thriller, vaguely reminiscent of Hitchcock and *Foreign Correspondent*, with direction as blank as the expression on Michael Caine's face throughout. (Donald Pleasence, Janet Suzman, Delphine Seyrig.)

BUSTER AND BILLIE

(Columbia-Warner)
More Forties' nostalgia, about a clean-cut Georgia schoolboy's doomed love for a girl from the other side of the tracks. Mercifully light on contemporary props, but indifferently scripted and lethargically directed. (Jan-Michael Vincent, Joan Goodfellow; director, Daniel Petrie.)

CARAVAN TO VACCARES

(Fox-Rank)
Reach-me-down Alistair MacLean plot, about a Hungarian scientist hiding out in a gypsy caravan in the Camargue en route to America. Plenty of simple rough stuff, with guns, fists, bulls and helicopters, but a demonstration that you can't keep a dull movie down. (Charlotte Rampling, David Birney, Michel Lonsdale; director, Geoffrey Reeve.)

**CHINATOWN (CIC)

Polanski's best for some time, taking the classic situation of the private eye and the enigmatic lady and developing it against a background of 1930s Los Angeles and chicanery over the city water supply. The plot holds up all the way; the multi-layered telling offers a range of interpretations, all of them intriguing. (Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway, John Huston.) Reviewed.

CONMAN AND THE KUNG FU KID (Golden Era)

Duck You Sucker Chinese style, with Henry Yue Young impeccably devious and director Wu Ma scrofulously degenerate in the Coburn and Steiger roles respectively. No politics or tragedy, but a lot of genial gags. (Suzy Mang Li, Shih Kien.)

*CONRACK (Fox-Rank)

More racial balm from Martin Ritt, about an idealistic young teacher (white) who educates a group of semi-illiterate children (black) with kindness, much to the discomfiture of his superiors (white and black). Fine performance from Jon Voight, but the whole is bland, beguiling and as remote from the real issues of intolerance and authoritarianism as its insular setting. (Hume Cronyn, Paul Winfield.)

DAISY MILLER (CIC)

Miscalculated, miscast attempt at the James story about an American innocent in Europe. Cybill Shepherd is obstinately a modern mid-western miss in a period wardrobe, and the eclectic tics of Bogdanovich's direction only compound the film's basic uncertainty about where it stands in relation to the original. (Barry Brown, Mildred Natwick.) Reviewed.

DANCE OF LOVE (Cinecenta)

La Ronde grinds on, much in need of oil, in an Austro-German adaptation (we get the French dialogue version, presumably because it sounds naughtier). Fair performances but leaden direction, with Schnitzler's dialogue losing the argument against crude sexploitation tactics. (Senta Berger, Sydne Rome, Maria Schneider, Helmut Berger; director, Otto Schenk.)

**DIRTY MONEY

(Columbia-Warner)
Un Flic is the late Jean-Pierre Melville's 'blues' for the vanished respect between cop and criminal, a collage of regrets, insecurities, betrayals and defeats. But Melville's passion for the genre—however equivocal—remains fervent: witness the portrayal of Delon's all too fallible cop, or the magisterial robbery of a train from the air. (Richard Crenna, Catherine Deneuve.) Reviewed.

11 HARROWHOUSE (Fox-Rank)

Young American, acting on the whim of a deranged tycoon, pulls off vast diamond theft in London. Nice performances from John Gielgud and James Mason; but any aspirations to do the big robbery plot with elegance fizzle and finally founder in some dire car-chasing. (Charles Grodin, Candice Bergen, Trevor Howard; director, Aram Avakian.)

**FEAR EATS THE SOUL

(Cinegate)
With a plot reworked from *All That Heaven Allows*—elderly German widow marries Moroccan immigrant labourer—Fassbinder's typically devious movie is both a vindication and a critique of Douglas Sirk. The balance between formal, stylised melodrama and psychological acuity was never finer. (Brigitte Mira, El Hedi Ben Salem, Barbara Valentin.) Reviewed.

FOR PETE'S SAKE

(Columbia-Warner)
Barbra Streisand wreaking havoc as a Brooklyn cab-driver's scatter-brained wife trying to raise money for a stock market killing. Energetic comedy in the screwball tradition which revives only memories of how much more inventively they used to do it thirty years ago. (Michael Sarrazin, Estelle Parsons; director, Peter Yates.)

GOLD (Hemdale)

Old-fashioned escapism in which Roger Moore suavely cracks a conspiracy to force up the price of South African gold. Shot on location (and decked out with local colour) and paced to order, though it's hard to see why anyone bothered to make the trip. (Susannah York, Ray Milland, Bradford Dillman; director, Peter Hunt.)

HARRAD EXPERIMENT, THE

(Fox-Rank)
How not to make a film about how to run an educational experiment in which students are paired off with the boy/girl most unlikely. Ludicrously sober-sided amalgam of nude yoga and extra-curricular groping which should set educational theory back ten years. (James Whitmore, Tippi Hedren, Don Johnson; director, Ted Post.)

*INTERNECINE PROJECT, THE

(British Lion)
Ingenious thriller about a White House-bound tycoon divesting himself of an embarrassing past by setting his henchmen to kill each other off. Neatly plotted and economically directed, round the edges of a too insistent romantic interlude. (James Coburn, Lee Grant, Harry Andrews, Michael Jayston; director, Ken Hughes.)

JONATHAN LIVINGSTON SEAGULL (CIC)

The American best-seller about the seagull who learns, via a trip to some bird Shangri-La, to fly faster than light. Stunning photography almost compensates for the allegorical flights of fancy. (Director, Hall Bartlett.)

LEGEND OF THE 7 GOLDEN VAMPIRES

(Columbia-Warner)
Hammer meet the Shaw Brothers in a collaboration that refreshes the English Gothic idiom but demeans the Chinese flair for supernatural poetry. Messy, bloody action, perfunctory eroticism, but splendidous vampires. (Peter Cushing, David Chiang, Shih Szu, Julie Ege; director, Roy Ward Baker.)

LIBIDO (EMI)

Trio of Australian sketches on sex, mostly providing embarrassment without edification. One episode partly redeemed by a couple of cheeky heroines, but the rest is dull. (Directors, John Murray, Tim Burstall, David Baker.)

MARSEILLE CONTRACT, THE

(Columbia-Warner)
Less a thriller than another unhappy meditation on the policeman's lot. Douglas Slocum's moody rendition of night-time shoot-outs and undercover police work in the twilight zone says as much as Anthony Quinn's musings and all the routine carnage and double-crosses. (Michael Caine, James Mason; director, Robert Parrish.)

NINE LIVES OF FRITZ THE CAT, THE

(Fox-Rank)
The past and future fantasies of a very weary cat, as Fritz meets Hitler and Henry Kissinger in a sequel which slinks a long way behind the original. Variable animation, indifferent satire. (Director, Robert Taylor.)

*PAPER CHASE, THE

(Fox-Rank)
Gullible student at Harvard Law School, much preoccupied with his exam results, falls for daughter of his sternest professor. A slightly unfocused account of conformism and milk-mild rebellion on the campus, with a lovely performance from John Houseman as the archetypal arrogant don. (Timothy Bottoms, Lindsay Wagner; director, James Bridges.)

*PHASE IV (CIC)

Ants taking over the world again, with only three stock figures (mad scientist, healthy lad, orphaned girl) and a computer waged against them. Saul Bass' first feature is an elegant set of graphic designs in search of an articulated plot. Oddly static for a suspense story, dramatically stilted, and with the usual 2001 echoes, but many shots are suitable for immediate framing. (Nigel

Davenport, Lynne Frederick, Michael Murphy.)

**PIROSMANI (Contemporary)

Another example of the Georgian cinema's artistic independence, a sober, probing look at the life of this primitive artist, with a visual style (dark-toned colours, simple set-ups) which unselfconsciously reflects the paintings. Directed by Georgy Shengelaya, with Avtandil Varazi, who plays the artist, doubling as the film's inventive designer.

**SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE, THE

(Contemporary)
Stylish first feature by Victor Erice. Rather laboured, with recourse to Maeterlinck, in its allegory of Spanish society after the Civil War; but appealingly atmospheric in elaborating the tale of two little girls so enchanted by Frankenstein's monster (Whale 1931 vintage) that they try to conjure him as a playmate. (Ana Torrent, Fernando Fernan Gomez, Teresa Gimpera.)

STARDUST (EMI)

Sequel to *That'll Be the Day*, tracing the career of a rock singer through mid-Sixties stardom to disillusionment and death from a drugs overdose. A jaundiced, insider's view of the pop explosion, meshing awkwardly with slabs of instant nostalgia. (David Essex, Adam Faith; director, Michael Apted.)

SUNSHINE (CIC)

Everyone tries so hard, it seems churlish to dismiss lightly this real life *Love Story* about a young hippy mum who records her last thoughts on tape before wilfully dying of cancer. But a potentially interesting debate on the ethics of self-euthanasia soon gets drowned in mawkish sentimentality, despite the good intentions. (Cristina Raines, Cliff De Young; director, Joseph Sargent.)

TAMARIND SEED, THE

(Scotia-Barber)
Dewy-eyed Home Office secretary Julie Andrews meets relentlessly romantic KGB official Omar Sharif, and throws both British and Russian secret services into confusion. The hilariously half-hearted flirtation with *entente* seems like the last vestige of Blake Edwards' erstwhile gift for comedy. (Anthony Quayle, Oscar Homolka, Sylvia Syms.)

*THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT!

(CIC)
Lavish compilation from MGM musicals, blown up to 70mm with the usual (but not disastrous) frame-clipping results. Extracts lovely (though unadventurous in choice) when not curtailed or drowned in chat; but put together with more lowbrow self-congratulation than critical acumen, respect or sense of history. (Director, Jack Haley, Jr.)

**THIEVES LIKE US

(United Artists)
Altman's cooler, more ironic 1970s version of the Depression novel about bank robbers on the run which Nicholas Ray filmed as *They Live By Night*. Interesting as an example of how styles have changed; fascinating in its own right as an extension of Altman's concern with American landscapes and off-beat obsessions. (Keith Carradine, Shelley Duvall.)

*VALLEE, LA (Mike Kaplan Films)

Journey to the centre of a cliché, with a French consular wife joining assorted love children in their quest for Eden in uncharted New Guinea. Nestor Almendros' landscape photography helps, but director Barbet Schroeder's frantic equivocations are really only vindicated by his excellent cast. (Bulle Ogier, Jean-Pierre Kalfon, Michael Gothard.)



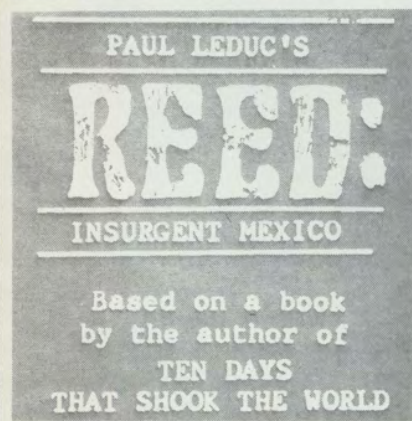
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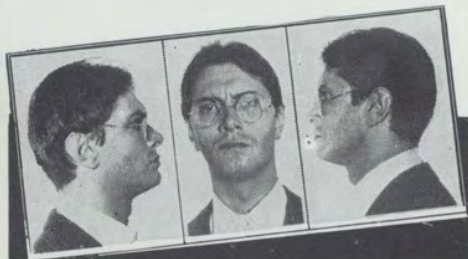


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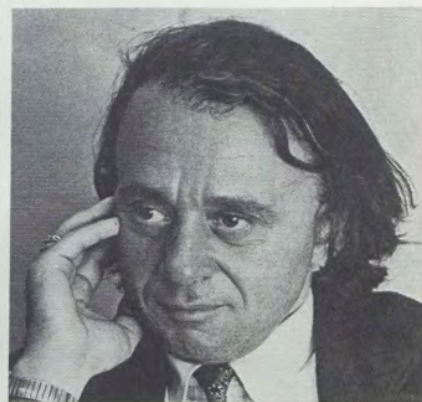
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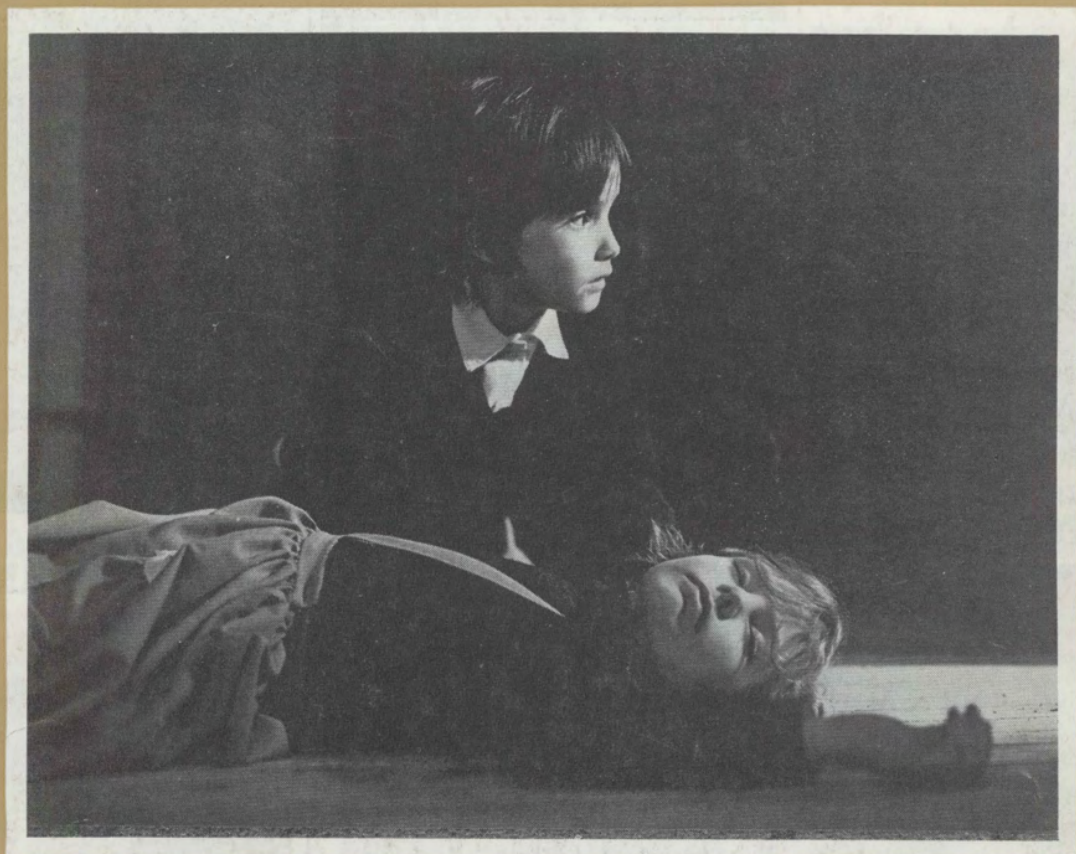
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